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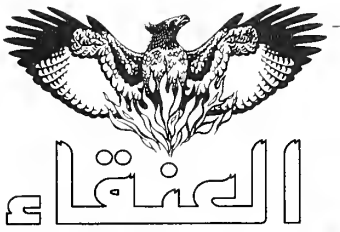

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the PHOENIX

Number 5 December 1988

Compiled and distributed by Michael C Jennings (ABBA Co-ordinator) *for contributors to the Atlas of the Breeding Birds of Arabia*

INTRODUCTION

The exciting news for the Atlas in 1988, if one can put aside Phil Hollom's new book *Birds of the Middle East and North Africa* and breeding Thick-billed Lark (see notes below), is the acquisition of a project sponsor. The National Commission for Wildlife Conservation and Development in Riyadh has agreed in principle to sponsor the project, during the data collection phase and to publish the Atlas in due course. The NCWCD and ABBA have had a very good working relationship for the last two years. No less than four atlasing surveys in Saudi Arabia have now been funded and assisted by the Commission. The ABBA objectives are part of the Commission's *National Action Plan* for wildlife and the environment and therefore the sponsorship deal is an obvious, mutually beneficial, arrangement.

The details of the formal agreement have not yet been hammered out but the outline arrangements are as follows. The NCWCD sponsorship would extend to four areas:

1) To meet the running costs of the project.
2) To provide the necessary equipment such as a computer, copier, filing cabinets, etc.
3) To support atlasing surveys of the co-ordinator.
4) To publish the results of the survey.

The running costs would include the employment of a part-time researcher for much-needed work on literature and museum sources and part-time assistant for secretarial and data processing work. This help, and the computer, will revolutionise the current 'manual' record system and greatly increase the service that can be offered to contributors and those researching Arabian birds. For example, in future I envisage that individual atlasers can be given a personalised print for all the birds breeding in squares near where they live so that they can direct their atlasing forays more purposefully. Those seeking information from ABBA on Arabian birds can be given much, much more information, such as breeding habits and relevant authors, than the 'draft distribution map' which is all that can reasonably be provided at the present time. As regards publication it is envisaged in the agreement that this will be done in two stages. Two years from the agreement being reached, a provisional Atlas will be prepared. This will be largely aimed at stimulating further field work but will also provide an extremely accurate reference source on the information collected so far. The provisional Atlas will include a map of all data collected up to a date about two years hence, plus basic breeding data but especially highlighting gaps in knowledge and coverage for each species. The final Atlas will follow some time afterwards.

The sponsorship agreement will resolve the threadbare financial arrangements that have characterised the Atlas since its inception. Now that money problems seem to be behind us I wish to record my very sincere thanks to all those who have given me such tremendous help by personal donations over the years, which have kept the scheme's head above water and enabled it to amass what is probably the most comprehensive information on breeding birds in Arabia that has ever been collected. There are, however, a few odd corners of project expenditure which it is not envisaged will be covered by the sponsorship agreement and therefore the gifts of readers and atlasers will continue to be very gratefully received.

1988 saw two major atlasing surveys on my part. A total of seven weeks was spent on two surveys to northern and central Saudi Arabia in the spring and in the Asir and southern Hejaz mountains in the summer. Full reports on both surveys will be prepared in the coming months. The report on the Asir National Park survey of July 1987 has been completed and published as NCWCD Technical Report No.4 and has been distributed to relevant libraries and organisations (a small number of copies of this report are available, see sales list enclosed with this issue). Two further exciting surveys are being planned for 1989 to virtually unrecorded areas.

With the exciting news of sponsorship for the project it is hoped that all atlasers can go into the desert in 1989 with renewed vigour.

Michael Jennings

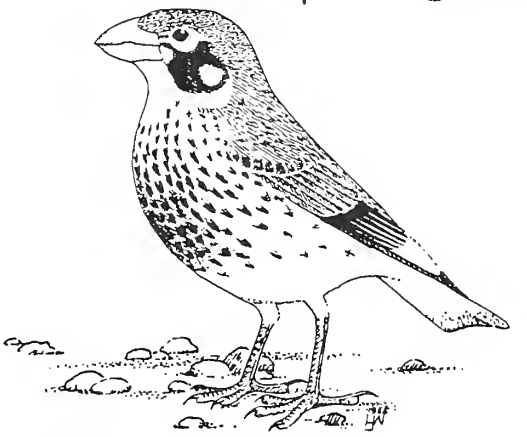

Fig 1 Thick-billed Lark. Found breeding in northern Saudi Arabia March, 1988

Sponsor
National Commission for
Wildlife Conservation and Development (NCWCD)
Riyadh, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

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الرياض - المملكة العربية السعودية

NEW BREEDING SPECIES: THICK-BILLED LARK

The Thick-billed Lark is on the ABBA list of breeding birds (Form 2) because it is a potential breeding species in Arabia. In fact it breeds in a broad band of desert across North Africa and there is a seemingly isolated breeding population east of Suez in Jordan. It is only known in Arabia as a rather scarce winter visitor southwards to about 20° N but it has long been suspected of breeding in northern parts of Saudi Arabia. Whilst atlasing in northern Saudi Arabia in March, 1988, I was especially looking for this species showing any evidence of breeding. It was located in the NCWCD Reserve at the Harrat al Harrah and nearby, being observed, quite regularly, in eight Atlas squares, although it was probably the rarest of the nine lark species present in the region at that time. Many were moving around as closely associating pairs, probably indicating that breeding was imminent. In the eastern part of the Harrat al Harrah Reserve (DB38) on 12 March two birds were seen collecting beak fulls of grasses and plant down and flying off with it. Peter Symens and I failed to locate the nest site however. Two days later, whilst we were near Jebel Amud (FA28) we again found a pair collecting nesting material. On this occasion, whilst sitting in a vehicle watching them around us, we could not work out where their nest site was. After walking a couple of hundred metres from the vehicle, and with Peter continuing his search nearby for evidence of the presence of Houbara, I settled down to watch a Dunn's Lark singing high overhead (it sang continuously for thirteen minutes). Looking back for progress with the Thick-billed Lark I saw one bird take nesting material down only about 15m from the vehicle. Following this up I quickly found an almost completed nest. It was situated on a slight gravel slope, placed just north of a small plant. It was deeply cupped into the ground, with a pebble glacis surrounding it. The nest cup was constructed of grass and twiglets and lined with some downy plant heads. We watched the pair coming to the nest for a while. It seemed that whilst both male and female were collecting nesting material only the female was actually involved in its construction.

Unfortunately I had to leave the area the next day so could not follow up the nest personally. Peter tells me that the pair were still nestbuilding a couple of days later but no eggs had been laid before he, too, had to leave. From the evidence of this nest and the behaviour of other pairs of Thick-billed Larks in the area, it was quite obvious that the species is an uncommon breeding bird in this part of northern Arabia.

M.C.J.

WHAT WE HAVE ALL BEEN WAITING FOR

When I first went to Arabia in 1969, there were very few fieldguides around and none that covered the Middle East. One had to be content with the old "Peterson, Mountfort & Hollom" (PMH). For extras like the White-cheeked Bulbul, which I saw on my first day in Bahrain, one had to take the word of others about identity, as such birds were only to be found in tomes covering the Indian region. Relief seemed just around the corner however, as Messrs Collins, on the dust jacket of their fieldguide which covered Eastern and Central Africa, proclaimed that a guide to the birds of the Middle East and North Africa was in preparation. Correspondence with Collins at the time indicated that the book would be a year or two in preparation. This was not to be. In fact the rather inadequate "Heinzel, Fitter and Parslow" which covered the Middle East but not Arabia, arrived first in 1972. This title was in time for my second 2 1/2 year spell in Arabia at Riyadh. It was very helpful at the time but I found that it did not cover a good number of the Arabian species, especially those of the south west. Even one or two birds of Palearctic origin were missing. For example, the fact that Dunn's Lark was not in that book is, I feel sure, the main reason that so few people until recently have recorded it in Palearctic Arabia. Dunn's Lark is, in fact, wide-spread and common throughout much of the interior deserts of Arabia. The Heinzel book also had a few staring errors which have remained uncorrected through various editions; for example, a whole generation of birders must by now be convinced that the Blackstart is sexually dimorphic!

The nineteen years' wait for Phil Hollom et al's book *Birds of the Middle East and North Africa* was worth it! Now we can all see what Dunn's Lark looks like and discover the truth about Blackstarts. In terms of knowledge and experience the team who produced this book could not have been better. Phil, Richard Porter and Steen Christensen all have a vast knowledge of the area and Ian Willis is one of the most acclaimed bird artists working today.

The important thing to remember about this new book is that it is "a companion guide". It is meant to be used in conjunction with the PMH guide that covers the more common species found in Western Europe. This is a very wise move as it frees the authors to concentrate on those species found in the Middle East and North Africa but not in Europe.

The publisher's blurb says 700 species are covered, of which 350 are illustrated in 40 plates, with an additional 100 line drawings and 500 2-colour maps. I didn't check these statistics but did notice that the maps are not what most people would think of as 2-coloured. There are red breeding ranges on black map outlines. They are not, as one would expect from this description, blue for winter range, red for breeding - which I suppose would make them 3-colour maps. But then nobody believes what publishers say do they?

The species accounts take up 243 of the 280 pages and are worked out as follows. If the species is a visitor or vagrant to the area and is dealt with in PMH it gets a very cursory mention, for example, Citril Finch, has two words "Vagrant Algeria", plus its size and a reference to PMH. If it is a breeding species adequately covered in the other field guides it gets a breeding range map and rather more on status, e.g. the places where it is migrant, winter visitor, summer visitor, etc. and habitat. For identification one has to turn to PMH. If the species has a distinct Middle East sub-species there is usually an illustration, either as a line drawing or on one of the colour plates. The final, and most complete level of treatment, is reserved for those species not found in Europe. They are all illustrated, have a very thorough description and, where appropriate, notes on voice along with information on status and habitat. This method of approach is unusual in a book of this kind but works well. Although some readers will be inconvenienced if they do not have the other book, most of us will appreciate not having to carry around more than is necessary.

This is the first time that all Arabian breeding species have been dealt with under one cover (Meinertzhagen's *Birds of Arabia* missed a number of species and, of course, many have been added to the Arabian list since then). The part we all turn to first when picking up a new fieldguide is the colour plates section. Perhaps, rather unfairly, such guides are judged by their colour plates. Again, all the special birds of Arabia, the Middle East and North Africa are illustrated

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* Scientific names of all species included in the project and their reference numbers are given on Form 2: *List of the Breeding Birds of Arabia* - issued free to all contributors. The names of other species and additions to the list are given in full. To save space, localities mentioned in the text (except major towns) are suffixed by the atlas square reference and these can be seen on the maps in this issue. Bibliographic references are kept to a minimum and are given in abbreviated form. All articles are attributable to the Editor unless otherwise shown.

in this book. The colour plates are to the very high and attractive standard we have come to expect of Ian Willis, showing, where appropriate, separate paintings of the different plumages for race, age and sex. But oh dear! The artist seems to have been let down badly by the printers. Unfortunately, most plates have a rather washed-out appearance, giving many species an anaemic look. Some of the blues, especially, are far too powdery and give a false impression of the bird in life. An example of this is the Little Rock Thrush on Plate 30. In nature it is a rather deep bluish-grey above with a rich chestnut belly but appears in the plate as a rather insipid ashy bird above. I, personally, didn't like the captions on the plates which have been written in free hand, presumably by the artist. Apparently written directly on to the art paper it gives a rather spidery effect and in one or two plates I had some difficulty deciding which caption referred to which bird. Apart from all this the plates are, however, truly lovely and include several species not illustrated in a similar book before. The only point of noteworthy inaccuracy that I found on the plates was that the Yemen and Arabian Serins are both misleadingly shown as robust, thick-billed finches. In fact, the Yemen Serin is a more slender, less dumpy bird than the other and it also has a much finer bill and, in my opinion, is much more stripy on the breast than depicted. The pictures will confuse observers unfamiliar with these two awkward species. I was happy to find that the text is correct on these features.

There are also a number of line drawings in the text by Steen Christensen, especially of raptors. I found these rather stiff, lacking the warmth and life which makes Ian Willis' work so attractive, but they were still probably better than similar drawings found in other fieldguides. The 'two-colour' maps at 59mm x 26mm each (i.e. about three postage stamps) are rather more generous in size than maps found in most other field guides but are still not very much room to show distribution from western Morocco to eastern Iran and from Aden to northern Turkey. The maps are good, however, and even tiny dots indicating isolated occurence are accurately registered. I think the descision to show only breeding range is sound as winter ranges can be easily located in other fieldguides or one can consult the text. I am pleased to say that the Arabian part of the maps, being based on ABBA drafts is the best set of Arabian bird distribution maps yet published. However, the data was taken from ABBA files two years ago and some now look rather quaintly old-fashioned to me, now that much more of Arabia has been atlased. (Note: The only part of the ABBA coverage not covered in this book is Socotra Island (PDRY) off the Horn of Africa.)

The book is topped and tailed with a short introduction, an explanation of the maps, taxonomy, a good list of references, a check list and an index. The laminated hardback cover of my book have been noticed to curl slightly but I understand from 'a source close to the publisher' that this is due to a slight moisture problem during manufacture which will cure itself in time.

This book is most highly recommended to every birder active in the Middle East area, particularly Arabia. Price £14, it is published by T.A.D.Poyser, Townhead House, Calton, Waterhouses, Staffordshire, ST10 3JQ.

M.C.J.

REPORTING PROCEDURES

Coverage: Farewell JA38 Hello KA36

Jim Mandaville has drawn attention to the fact that a boundary agreement between Saudi Arabia and Iraq in 1981 (ratified in Riyadh in 1982) has erased the neutral territory between the two countries (see *Phoenix* 4, p.3). The agreement also straightened out several of the kinks along the 900 km common border. The result is that the ABBA area of coverage, which is limited to the political boundaries of the countries of the Arabian Peninsula, needs some adjustment. The original ABBA coverage map was based on the 1972 version of the USGS/Ministry of Petroleum and Mineral Resources (Jedda) 2,000,000 map. The up-dated 1984 version of this map shows the above boundary changes. The net effect to ABBA coverage is that square JA38 is now totally in Iraq and is lost to the project, but KA36 is now partly in Saudi Arabia and is gained. Future editions of maps used in the project will reflect these changes. The maps in this issue incorporate these changes.

Personal Computer Records

Increasingly, observers are keeping their records on their own personal computers and the more enterprising are generating ABBA report sheets (Form 3) direct from these records. This is a development which is to be continuously encouraged, provided those thinking of presenting records in computer generated format adhere to the following rules:

a) All data must be presented in the same sequence of the columns as Form 3.
b) Dates must be in the sequence of day/month/year. Many computers are pre-programmed to 'American' dates of month/day/year, which can create havoc with existing ABBA records if not corrected.
c) A space, equivalent to at least two lines of print, should be left between each record.
d) Space must be provided on the right hand side for 'official use', equivalent to columns 7 and 8 of Form 3.

Failure to keep to these rules may mean records will have to be transcribed into the correct format before they can be properly accessioned.

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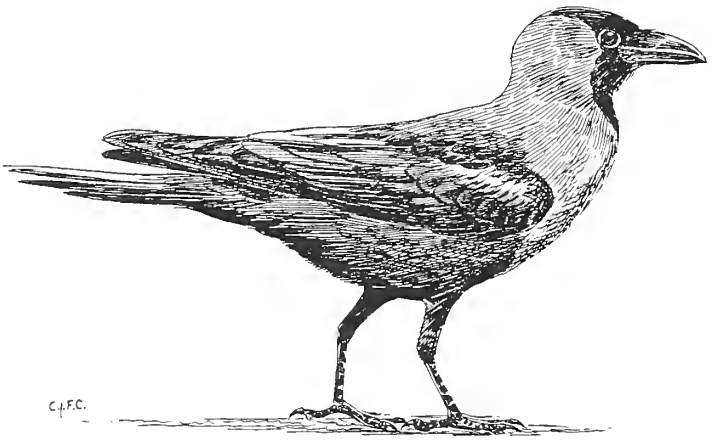

Fig 2 Indian House Crow. Now a serious pest species in Aden and increasing in numbers near other coastal towns in Arabia.

ORIENTAL MENACE

Governments all around the Indian Ocean and to some extent in the Red Sea, are taking note of the spread and the worrying population increases locally of the Indian House Crow. This species has experienced population explosion throughout the region in the last couple of decades and is now a major source of concern to the authorities in its adopted homes from the Seychelles to Suez and from Aden to Zanzibar. In some areas where it was hardly known a dozen years ago it is now officially classified as a pest and control (extermination) programmes have been started.

Amongst the several undesirable aspects of its behaviour in its new found territories is its effect on the native avifauna. In Mombasa it is heavily predatory on some local species, for example colonially nesting weavers have all but disappeared from the House Crow's range. At Suez the Hooded Crow has now disappeared because of constant harassment by this vigorous and

aggressive species. In areas where it is common it drives away potential competitors for carrion such as the Black Kite and hassles others, especially colonially nesting species such as herons and terns, taking young and eggs. It attacks domestic animals, reptiles, rodents, even humans, and is thought to be instrumental in spreading human diseases. It is intelligent and cunning and feeds on anything a group can overpower. It has even been known to plunge into water for fish and feeds at night where there is illumination.

Reports of its predatory habits are rare so far in Arabia except from Aden where it is now especially abundant and a control programme has been started. Information is needed on the species it preys upon, the economic damage it causes and interactions between it and native species in Arabia. Please report all relevant observations, for example in respect of competition for nest sites, food stealing, unprovoked aggression etc., on the standard report, Form 3. News is also needed of its breeding needs and nidification. Does it for example have the curious habit of building wire nests in Arabia which it has learnt to do in many other parts of its range?

THE FORMER DISTRIBUTION OF THE HOUBARA

The species for which most enquiries are received is the Houbara. It is a bird closely linked to Arab folklore and is one of two species whose numbers have been drastically reduced in Arabia this century. The other is the Arabian Ostrich which is now extinct - see *Phoenix* 4. There are currently several attempts in Arabia to breed this bird in captivity with a view, eventually, to reintroduction.

As a large, edible bird the Houbara has always had a price on its head. Before firearms were widely available it was trapped in a variety of ingenious ways and when guns came along it was shot on sight. In addition, it has always been the traditional prey of falconers. A combination of guns and falconers reduced the Houbara population throughout Arabia to almost negligible numbers by about 1950. We are more enlightened now, perhaps, but there is still much hunting pressure on this bird and the Houbara is having a hard time re-establishing itself in those corners of Arabia where it survived. Current breeding localities are widely separated and these would appear to be only in the extreme northern regions of Saudi Arabia and in central Oman, with possibly a small population in PDRY.

A hundred years ago the Houbara was widespread in the plains of northern Arabia and a reasonable picture of former distribution can be pieced together from the records of travellers and visitors to those areas who kept detailed records. It is a fortunate paradox that both the Houbara and the Ostrich were more often recorded in travellers' logs than other birds. Even those visitors with absolutely no interest in the natural environment could not resist entering notes in their diary such as, "Bedouin brought me fresh Houbara eggs for breakfast", and thereby recorded a Breeding Evidence Code 15 for posterity. The former distribution of the Ostrich has already been published in *Phoenix* 4 and that for the Houbara is shown in Fig 3.

One of the biggest problems for the recovery of the Houbara today in Arabia is over-grazing by domestic stock. Sheep and goats not only eat the plants which are also favoured by the Houbara but do such an effective job on the vegetation that they deprive the Houbara of cover for nesting as well. Nevertheless, the former breeding areas shown on the map may be regarded as a potential range map for the reintroduction of this bird to Arabia should any of the captive breeding exercises be successful. Any reintroduction, of course, will have to go hand-in-hand with a commitment from desert users to keep their finger off the trigger and their hand firmly holding the jesses.

FUTURE BREEDERS AND EXOTICS IN KUWAIT

Moustached Warbler

Until about 1980 records indicated that the Moustached Warbler was essentially an uncommon passage migrant in Kuwait, but since October 1981 it has become increasingly more common. This species has been a regular winter visitor to the Jahra Pool (NB 35) for the past seven years and during the last three winters it has been present from early November until at least mid-April. On several occasions, during single visits to readily

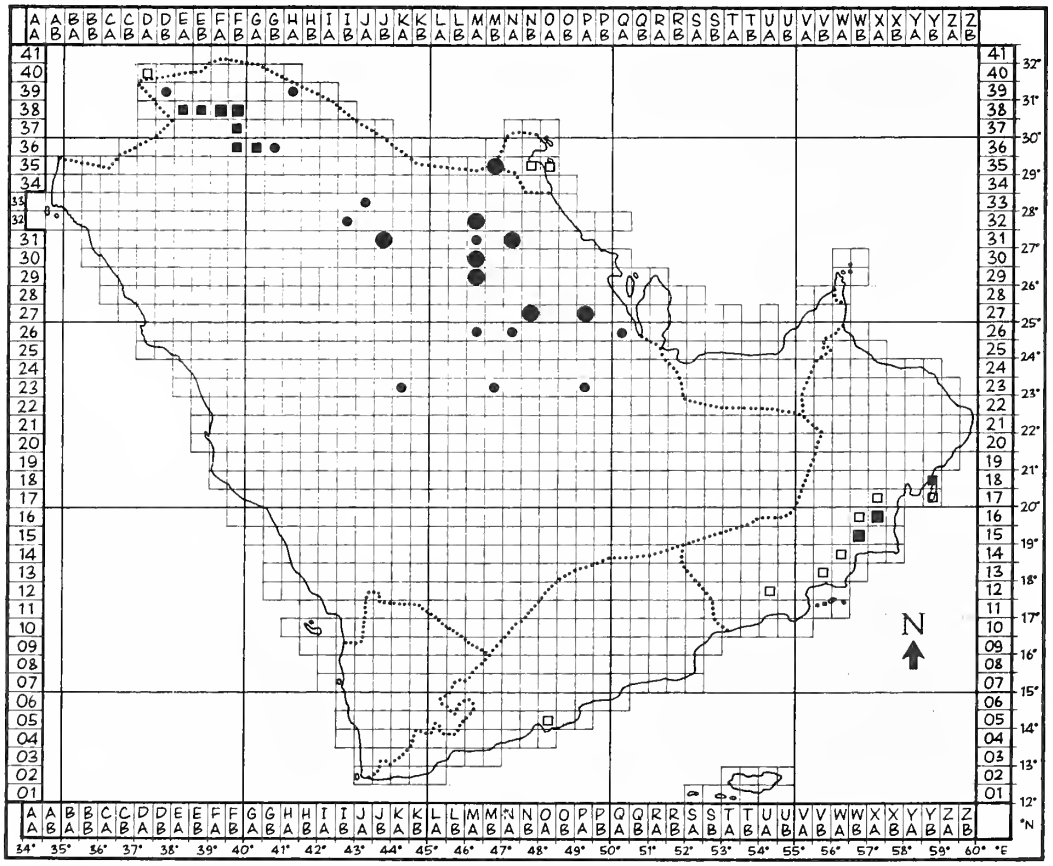

Fig 3 Houbara. Breeding records prior to 1954 show a much wider distribution in N.Arabia than at present.
Prior to 1954
● Confirmed breeding
• Other records
After 1954
■ Confirmed breeding
▪ Probable breeding
□ Other records

accessible fringes of the reed beds, up to 12 individuals have been sighted and I estimate that there would have been 40-50 birds present in all. On numerous occasions singing males have shown aggressive territorial behaviour, particularly in February, but it has not been possible to allocate a breeding code of higher than 04. Never the less, it seems highly likely that breeding has taken place.

The Moustached Warbler's change of status in Kuwait over the past decade illustrates the point that habitat changes brought about by agriculture or industry may well be exploited by migrants to, or through, the region. The Jahra Pool area has changed greatly since 1978, when the site comprised a very shallow pool of relatively clean, drainage water. At that time the open expanse of water extended to nearly two acres and was virtually devoid of vegetation. Today the pool area is completely choked with reeds *Phragmites* sp and an increased volume of effluent has permitted them to flourish, so that they now occupy an area several times greater than the original site.

The Moustached Warbler breeds in several areas in the immediate region; viz. to the east, just across the head of the Gulf in Iran, immediately to the north, in the marshes of Iraq, and to the south in the reed beds close to Hofuf in the Eastern Province of Arabia.

Spanish Sparrow

A note in *Phoenix* 3 commented on how close the Spanish Sparrow came to breeding in Kuwait, when a colony of more than 100 birds was present near Ahmadi (0A35) throughout February, 1955. Many of them engaged in breeding activities, including copulation and construction of completed nests, but the colony suddenly deserted the site and left the area before any eggs were laid.

The Spanish Sparrow was described in *Phoenix* as wintering erratically in Kuwait, but since I began keeping detailed records 10 years ago, this species has occurred here in every winter and it is now more accurate to describe it as a regular winter visitor. Generally the first arrivals are in November and departures in late March, with the highest numbers being present in January and February. In several years I have witnessed breeding behaviour to the extent of occasional nest building activities only, but the following observations may be of interest.

In March and April 1986, two male Spanish Sparrows were present at Umm al Aish oil camp (0A33), where there is a resident population of about 100 House Sparrows, many of which nest in *Prosopis, Tamarix* and *Eucalyptus* trees. The two Spanish Sparrows seemed to be associated with a colony of House Sparrows nesting in tall trees in front of the camp offices, but neither I nor my companions noted any obvious breeding behaviour on their part. The following year, on 1 May 1987, whilst mist netting in the garden in front of these same offices, we trapped a male that was clearly a hybrid Spanish x House Sparrow. We noted after its release that this male was paired with a House Sparrow and they both entered the same nest on several occasions. Whether the hybrid was the result of a local mating between a Spanish and a House Sparrow could not be determined, of course, but this seems to have been highly probable.

Red-vented Bulbul

I first caught sight of a Red-vented Bulbul in the grounds of Ahmadi Hospital in the spring of 1981. The following year I saw two birds together in a private garden in Ahmadi but could not determine if they were breeding. In subsequent years 'non-birding' aquaintances living in the town mentioned from time to time that they had seen Red-vented Bulbuls in their gardens, and it seemed certain that the species had established itself.

The first confirmed breeding came from a private agricultural garden/plot in Messilah, some 30 km north of Ahmadi. Unfortunately, this garden is inaccessible, being fenced off from the road by a two-metre high, chain-link fence, through which we are able to do our watching! Inside the fence is a *Tamarix* wind-break and at the north end of the garden, which is about 200 metres long, there are groups of tall *Prosopis* and *Tamarix*. At the end of January 1986 I noted that a pair of bulbuls appeared to have a nest site in a group of *Tamarix* and by 20 February they were feeding young. In the following year three pairs of birds were established in or within 300 metres of this same garden and young were being fed through early March. I also received a report that Red-vented Bulbuls were breeding at that time in a large private garden about 3 km to the south-west of the Messilah site.

These bulbuls have not been in evidence at the Messilah site this year. I assume that they have moved away because of disturbance from the huge construction project on closely adjacent land.

Prof.C.W.T.Pilcher

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SITES OF INTEREST

Those who have tackled atlas work know just how fulfilling a pursuit it can be. The common birds can be ticked off in each new square visited, the absence of expected birds becomes intriguing and a challenge and the presence of unexpected birds is always exciting. On subsequent visits to a square which one is already familiar with, one can try to upgrade the previous BEC's obtained. Because of this all sites can be of interest to the atlasser. These following site notes seek to detail the variety and diversity of bird habitats throughout Arabia and the representative birds to be found in each. It is not meant to be a 'where to watch birds in Arabia' or a directory to the most prolific bird sites, although inevitably, some sites are exceptionally good.

Observers are asked to submit reports of other interesting sites or those that they have studied reasonably well, drawing special attention to the breeding and resident species occurring. A site may be as small as a sewage pond or other microsite, an urban area or as big as a mountain range.

Das and Qarneyn Islands, U.A.E.

Das Island is approximately 175km NW of Abu Dhabi city. The island is 2km long by 1km wide, and its position in the Arabian Gulf is 25°09'N, 52°52'E (SB27). Oil from the Umm Shaif and Zakum Fields is piped to Das Island where it undergoes a process to separate the gases from the crude oil. The oil is stored in tanks until sea-going tankers collect and transport it around the world. The gas is separated into methane, ethane, propane, butane and pentane, cooled and then stored as Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG). Sea-going gas carriers then transport it, mainly to Japan.

Many migratory birds visit Das Island despite the vast amount of industrial plant and a large population of workers. Some bird species are common in both spring and autumn, such as Kentish Plover, Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos*, Swift Tern, Turtle Dove, Swallow, Red-throated Pipit *Anthus cervinus*, Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava*, Whitethroat *Sylvia communis* and Redstart *Phoenicurus phoenicurus*. Rarer species are also seen, such as Booted Eagle *Hieraaetus pennatus*, Spotted Eagle *Aquila clanga*, Pallid Harrier *Circus macrourus*, Avocet *Recurvirostra avocetta*, Dotterel *Charadrius morinellus*, Arctic Skua *Stercorarius parasiticus*, Pallid Swift, Indian Roller, Grey Hypocolius *Hypocolius ampelinus*, Icterine Warbler *Hippolais icterina*, Orphean Warbler *Sylvia hortensis* and House Bunting. Only one species actually nests on the Island itself, this being the Feral Pigeon, of which there are hundreds.

About 1km offshore there are three oil tanker loading berths; one is a single buoy mooring, and the others fixed to the sea bed. One of these is no longer in use and has been taken over by

White-cheeked Terns as a nesting site. On 1 May 1987 I visited the berth in order to try and count breeding pairs. As soon as the boat pulled alongside the gangway a multitude of terns arose, wheeling and screeching above my head. Some even dive-bombed so a safety helmet was an essential piece of equipment. Once onto the main deck I spotted eggs, nests and chicks everywhere. Covering the whole deck area as quickly as possible I counted 84 nests. Some birds had made an attempt at building an untidy little structure using a small amount of old bleached fish bones but many had merely laid eggs on the painted metal surface. The eggs were in various stages, some newly-laid, some hatching while I watched. In places they were so close together that it was impossible to distinguish how many eggs there were per pair of adults. I suspect some terns were hatching eggs belonging to others. Quite a few chicks had hatched; some were a couple of days old, others a couple of weeks old and these scurried under gratings and pipes when approached. Many chicks were dead, which is understandable when it is realised they are in the open on a hot metal surface in a midday shade temperature of up to 45°C.

The White-cheeked Terns also nest on the 'dolphins'; these are steel piles sunk into the sea bed with a capstan on top used for securing the mooring ropes of oil tankers. These birds also nest on the LNG loading jetty but unfortunately this area is out of bounds to myself. However, I estimate approximately 200 pairs of White-cheeked Terns bred on the offshore structures around Das Island in 1987.

During the winter of 1985/86 a pair of Ospreys attempted to breed on No.2 berth, which is in use. An untidy nest consisting of sticks, polythene bags, old oily gloves, pieces of wood, wire, sea weed, an eight-inch length of hacksaw blade, and grass was constructed on top of the lifeboat davit, but no eggs were laid. This berth is in constant use by tankers loading so perhaps the noise and disturbance by day and night deterred the birds; also an Osprey's nest in full view would stand a good chance of being raided by a crew member - not everyone is conservation-minded. The Ospreys did not attempt to breed at this site in the winter of 1986/87.

Qarneyn Island is about half the size of Das and is situated 27km south of that island at position 24°56'N, 52°51'E (SB26) I personally have never been there; in fact there is only a radio station there which is presently unmanned. Ian Foxall was one of the last people to be stationed on Qarneyn and left in 1984. I write this using his records.

One pair of Ospreys bred regularly in a nest just 20 feet from the sea at one end of the rough aircraft landing strip. Eggs were laid in December. In the 1982/83 season two eggs were laid; one was apparently infertile, but the other hatched successfully and the chick fledged on 4 April. During the 1983/84 seaon three eggs were laid, all hatched and all chicks fledged, the last leaving the nest by 23 March.

Red-billed Tropicbirds are also winter breeders and about 200 pairs nest on Qarneyn. Natural holes and crevices in the hilly north end of the island are used as nest sites in which only one egg is laid, usually in early December. The chicks hatch in February and leave the island before the terns arrive in April. Four species of tern breed on Quarneyn: Swift, Lesser-crested, Bridled and White-cheeked. Bridled Terns arrive in early May and quickly pair up before dispersing over most of the island. The nests are just a hollow scrape under a stone or bush and contain one egg; two in a nest is quite rare. In May 1984 Ian found 30-40 colonies of White-cheeked Terns, each colony consisting of 50-200 pairs, with nests only 2 feet apart and an average clutch of two. Swift and Lesser-crested terns also breed on Qarneyn, the latter being more numerous. The two main colonies contained many thousands of birds but the species kept themselves separated within the colonies. Lesser-crested Tern chicks formed large creches within a week of hatching and left the nest sites for the safety of rocks. Both species had left the island by the end of September.

Approximately 100 Sooty Gulls winter on the island, this number doubling during the breeding season. They nest away from the other birds, usually in the shade of a boulder which offers some protection. It seems the breeding cycle is linked to that of the terns because Sooty Gull chicks are fed almost exclusively on terns' eggs and chicks. The average clutch is three, laid over an eight day period and the chicks are on the wing within six weeks.

Many thanks to Len Reaney and Rob Western for also supplying information used in this article.

David C.Heath, L.R.P.S.

Tailpiece

The author reports that the White-cheeked Terns nested again on the loading berths at Das Island in 1988 but approximately 10 weeks later. He suggests the long, cold, wet winter may be the reason. Ed.

The Liwa Oases, U.A.E.

Following a report from the ABBA Co-ordinator that little breeding information was available for several squares in the remote south-east corner of the U.A.E. I decided to visit the Liwa Oasis (TA22/23, TB23 and UA23) on the northern edge of the Rub al Khali (The Empty Quarter) and record all that I found over the weekend 24/25th March 1988. In addition to collecting breeding data, the trip was rewarding in terms of migrant sightings and it confirmed that many small passerines must fly over the Empty Quarter, while most commercial airlines feel safer to fly around it!

The Liwa is reached by travelling south for 100 km from Tarif on the Arabian Gulf coast, on a good quality metalled road. Half-way to Liwa one passes through Medinat Zayed (TB24), a quickly developing new town situated amongst the small active red sand dunes, before their transition to the high pale dunes of the interior. I spent an hour in the vicinity of the town, finding only Palm Dove and Great Grey Shrike in the landscaped grounds of the Ruler's guest house. I found no House Sparrows.

As one approaches Liwa the sand hills rise up to over 100 meters, all showing naturally formed slip faces on the southern side, a result of the prevailing north to north-westerly wind. The oases which run in an east-west arc lie in a chain of depressions linked by a remarkably modern road, a dual-carriageway which runs for 120 km. penetrating deep into the remoteness of the region. Drifting sands and high dunes rise on both sides, so venturing off this motorway without a properly equipped vehicle can prove extremely hazardous. There are 12 permanent villages in the Liwa, situated in the fertile depressions in the northern lee of the dunes. In addition there are 28 settlements, occupied only at date harvest and pollination time. I found very few people away from the village of Liwa (at the main road T-junction, from where the road heads 60 km east or west). The settlements are no more than simple cultivations, most no bigger than 50 hectares, planted predominantly with date palm. There are some fruit trees, and a mixture of other introduced species, but most importantly fresh water is available, and many cultivations are watered by a series of channels supplied from a diesel pump adjacent to a well. At one 30 hectare cultivation at Bilaq, 40 km west of the T-junction, adjacent to a well I found Hoopoe, Wryneck *Jynx torquilla*, Tree Pipit *Anthus trivialis*, Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava* (of three different races!), White Wagtail *Motacilla alba*, Redstart *Phoenicurus phoenicurus*, Pied Wheatear *Oenanthe pleschanka*, a Semi-collared Flycatcher *Ficedula semitorquata* and five Pale Rock Sparrow! In the nearby trees there was a selection of warblers, namely Olivaceous,

Menetries *Sylvia mystacea*, Blackcap *S.atricapilla*, Desert Lesser Whitethroat *S.minula* and Willow Warblers *Phylloscopus trochilus*. All at their first staging post since crossing the Rub al Khali from the south. Palm Dove were present in all settlements, but only two House Sparrows were found, near the Liwa T-junction (TB23). The second most common species was Indian Silverbill, a surprise, and an indication of its nomadic character to have colonised such a remote place. It occurred in small parties, up to 15 birds, in all the cultivations. Brown-necked Raven was present even in the remotest of sand dune areas between cultivations. Probably resident, one Great Grey Shrike was seen at Namla cultivation (UA23), 40 km from Liwa village, at a time when its mate was probably at the nest. (This reinforces my understanding of this species, which has been recorded in every habitat in the U.A.E. and appears to be even more widespread than Brown-necked Raven!)

Swallow was seen everywhere though in small numbers. Only one each of Sand Martin *Riparia riparia* and House Martin *Delichon urbica* were found, though two of the rarer Red-rumped Swallow were flying above a garden in square TB23, near the junction.

Colin Richardson.

The Masafi area, U.A.E.

There has been no organised ornithological study of the northern section of the Hajar range in the northern United Arab Emirates since the early springs of 1970 and 1971 when Michael Gallagher led expeditions to observe, record and collect specimens of the region's natural history. EXERCISE TAYUR WATCH from 31 Jan-10 Feb 1970 and EX LAPWING from 20-31 March 1971, sponsored by Headquarters Land Forces Gulf were centred on the village of Masafi (WA27), an area which has greatly changed in the last 17 years. I retraced very briefly the footsteps of the members of these expeditions and recorded all birds found in a 24 hour period 3-4 March 1988.

Masafi lies in a pass at about 400 metres, in the centre of the Hajar mountain range which form a barrier between the western facing desert plains of the Arabian Gulf and the fertile coastal belt of the eastern U.A.E. which faces the Gulf of Oman (see Fig 4). The area covered during this study encompasses the heads of Wadi Ham and Wadi Siji (which continues as Wadi Nakh north of Masafi). The surrounding mountains are dark, bare and rugged, mostly igneous rock, although there are outcrops of hills consisting of a pale cretaceous shale, which support the greater number of species. The little vegetation is mostly goat-grazed acacia but during my visit there was evidence of considerable new growth following heavy rains in mid-February.

The dark ophiolitic barren peaks bounding the course of Wadi Siji from Siji village yielded few birds. However the calls (yelps) of Desert Lark were heard continuously and small groups were observed in most locations on the broken stony hillsides and adjacent gravel plains. Palm Doves were common throughout and appeared to be nesting. Black-capped Bulbuls were seen amongst the few trees in the deep wadi and on the upper level of gravel plains dotted with stunted thorn. Up to seven birds were observed together and much chasing from tree to tree was taking place. Purple Sunbird were here too, the male now in glossy breeding plumage. A pair of Sand Partridge were disturbed on the lower hill slopes.

A range of smaller scale (up to 800 metres) cretaceous hills stretch west of Masafi towards Tayibah, and are generally of more interest to the naturalist than the surrounding dark peaks. Here, shrubs, acacia and - after the recent rains - grasses and light vegetation are more abundant. As a result, birdlife is more diversified and twenty species were recorded in this area. While climbing a low hill I watched two Brown-necked

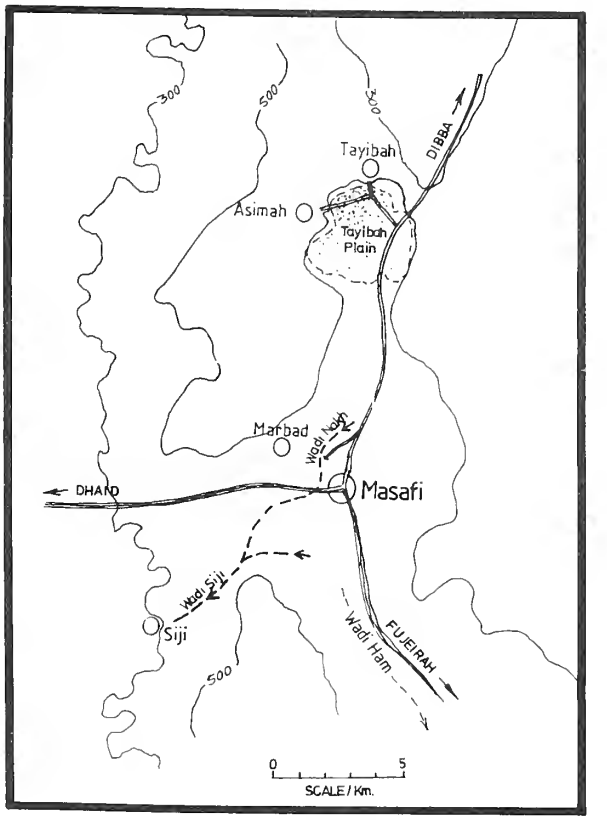

Fig 4 Position of Masafi, U.A.E.

Raven flying over in a northerly direction, and a number of Pale Crag Martin, 8 in all, sailed over the valley. The previous evening at dusk I had seen a number of Pallid Swifts feeding, their nesting colony probably nearby. Along a narrow, winding and uninhabited V-shaped wadi on the east side of the valley I found the ubiquitous Desert Lark, some in pairs, and a number of interesting non-residents. Two Red-tailed Wheatears *Oenanthe xanthoprymna* were still present and one male Black Redstart *Phoenicurus ochruros* was perched on a thorn tree on the nearby slopes. Both are winter visitors and likely to be gone by the end of March. Two fine male Rock Thrush *Monticola saxatilis* sat on a ledge about 10 metres above my head. Movement in a small acacia alerted me to a Plain Leaf Warbler *Phylloscopus neglectus*, a scarce winter visitor, and often overlooked due to its similarity to the more common wintering Chiffchaff. Apart from its 'plain' grey plumage its calls include a distinctive harsh "chick".

Above me a single bird, which by its undulating flight and outline I took to be a pipit, landed high up on the mountain-side. Its back was light-brown and its underside was even paler with no distinguishing markings. It was too far off to see clearly but it resembled a Tawny Pipit. I could not gauge its size, nor see the size of its bill, but I concluded it must be the elusive Long-billed Pipit. As I approached to get a better look, it flew off and was never seen again.

I found a whole different range of avifauna in the cultivated lower valley of Wadi Nakh adjacent to the old village of Masafi, Graceful Warblers were calling everywhere and a pair of Indian Rollers displayed above the palm groves. It was surprising to find Grey Francolin roaming freely in one densely overgrown garden. This species is unusual so deep in the mountains and may have been introduced. Similarly 'introduced' a Ring-necked Parakeet flew noisily over a few minutes later. A Little Green Bee-eater was hunting from telegraph wires in the village.

About 5 miles north of Masafi on the road to Dibba the road crosses Tayibah gravel plain, situated at the head of Wadis Tayibah and Asimah. Pied Wheatear were perched prominently on many acacia trees - I counted 14 males and 1 female in 4

hours, indicating major passage taking place. Five European Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe* were also present. Those trees which did not host a wheatear were bristling with House Bunting. Over twenty were counted, but probably three times that number were present on the plain that day. The plain was divided partially by Wadi Asimah at one side and here I found another pair of Sand Partridge, a Red-tailed Wheatear and a male Blue Rock Thrush *Monticola solitarius*. A female Rock Thrush was perched amongst the foliage of a small tree, and a party of five very vocal Arabian Babbler played follow-my-leader with no apparent sign of pairing. Another Plain Leaf Warbler was seen and amongst the surface layer of broken stones two Tawny Pipit *Anthus campestris* were feeding.

Stangely coy, normally widespread resident species Hume's Wheatear, Scrub Warbler, Great Grey Shrike and localised breeder Indian Silverbill were not recorded. Shy, localised and unobtrusive, sandgrouse were not chanced upon, nor were owls and larger birds of prey. Colin Richardson.

The Harrat al Harrah Reserve, Northern Saudi Arabia

The Harrat al Harrah reserve, in the extreme north of Saudi Arabia (mainly squares EA39, EB39, EB38, FA38 & FA37) is a bleak and inhospitable region of ancient lava flows and low basalt jebels. It covers some 17,000 sq km and is managed by the National Commission for Wildlife Conservation and Development which employs a permanent guard force to protect it. Although completely treeless, like the rest of northern Arabia, it is unique for its rich coverage of small shrubs, grasses and herbs, which are the direct result of a policy to exclude bedouin and their flocks, over the last two years. This exclusion of stock and the good vegetational cover have created optimum conditions for many species of ground dwelling birds. In turn, the abundant population of small birds and rodents makes available ample prey for several predatory species. The Harrat al Harrah reserve region was one of the last places where the Ostrich occurred in Saudi Arabia - it has been extint since about 1930. It is one of the very few places that the Houbara breeds in the Kingdom. Altogether there are some 24 species of birds currently breeding in the reserve and a further 10 species which may be categorised as probable or possible breeding birds. The avifauna of the reserve is by far the richest of any comparable zone in northern Arabia.

In addition to the diversity of bird species, the abundance of individual species is very much greater in the reserve than anywhere in the surrounding regions. The most prominent family represented in the reserve are the larks, of which no less than nine species are likely to breed. This is probably the highest number of breeding lark species for any similar sized region anywhere in the Arabian Peninsula. The breeding larks include the Thick-billed Lark, found breeding in March 1988 (see page 1), and the Bimaculated Lark, which was commonly in pairs and singing and almost certainly bred in March 1988 in some numbers. The Lesser Short-toed Lark is a locally common breeder. Other common breeding larks are Dunn's, Bar-tailed and Temminck's Horned. The Houbara finds optimum feeding and breeding conditions in the reserve and has bred there in the last several years, probably the only place it regularly does so in Saudi Arabia. Populations of this species are nevertheless, very small, with a total of perhaps only one or two dozen breeding females. However, provided its protection from hunting is continued and the exclusion of stock is rigorously enforced, these population levels should gradually build up and there seems no reason why it should not become common within the reserve in years to come. Predatory birds include the Golden Eagle which was proved to breed in March 1988, Long-legged Buzzard, Kestrel, probably Barbary Falcon, Eagle Owl, Little Owl, and Hume's Owl. Cream-coloured Coursers are particularly common on the rocky plains and a few Sand Partidge can be heard - more rarely seen - on the jebels. White-crowned Black Wheatear are relatively common but Rock Dove, Brown-necked Raven and Trumpeter Finch which might be expected to be common are generally scarce. The House Sparrow occurs on the only two buildings in the reserve - the Portacabins of reserve Headquarters and guards' accommodation.

The category of possible and probable breeding birds for the reserve include the Chukar Partridge, Desert Wheatear *Oenanthe deserti* (which, although not known as a breeding bird anywhere in Arabia, has been seen in pairs and singing in Spring), Pale Rock Sparrow and the scarce and local Desert Finch.

The treelessness of the reserve accounts for the complete absence of some typical Arabian species and rarity of others, for example Great Grey Shrike and Scrub Warbler are only present in very small numbers and those species usually associated with acacias are absent altogether, e.g. Babbler, Blackstart and Yellow-vented Bulbul.

In winter the reserve has been shown to be an important wintering area in Arabia for the Houbara and has also been recently identified as a wintering zone for the Dotterel *Charadrius morinellus*, only the second known site for the wintering of this species in Arabia. In addition, the good vegetational cover has, during recent winters, attracted many hundreds of Black-bellied *Pterocles orientalis* and Pin-tailed Sandgrouse, the former species being previously almost unknown in Arabia.

If the policy to exclude stock animals and the ban on hunting continues, and disturbance by outsiders is kept to a minimum (for example, a particular problem is posed by bedouin truffle gatherers), then it is certain that the avifauna of the reserve will continue to improve and enlarge. If, however, these policies are relaxed, even for a few months, the vegetation will rapidly be degraded by livestock and the reserve will quickly revert to holding only the impoverished avifauna which is found elsewhere in northern Arabia.

M.C.J.

Farasan Islands, Red Sea, Saudi Arabia

The Farasan Islands lie some 80 km off the Saudi Arabian mainland opposite Gizan, between 16°29' and 17°10'N and 41°30' and 42°30'E (mainly squares HB10 and IA10). The archipelago is comprised of dozens of named islands and inumerable islets and sandbars. There are only two of any large size and these are Farasan Kebir and Segid, both of which have settled villages. All the islands are low-lying with a substrate of fossil coral. The two large islands have a very broken terrain of small hills, gullies and craggy coastal cliffs, although there are also subkha tidal flats and mangrove thickets on the coast. In many places there is dense scrub with acacia and euphorbia thickets. Agriculture activities and date cultivation are minimal, the main traditional occupation being fishing.

I was able to visit the Islands for just two days in March 1985. During those two days I added several land bird species to the known list of birds resident or breeding on the islands. My observations, plus a few records gleaned from diverse published sources and some unpublished reports (including from ABBA files), have now been published (Jennings, 1988, *Fauna of Saudi Arabia* 9: 457-467). The breeding birds list at that time had 19 seabirds and shore birds and 11 land birds, including seven passerines. The seabirds and shore birds include Brown Booby, Red-billed Tropicbird, Sooty and White-eyed Gull and seven terns.

One of the most interesting observations of my own trip in 1985 was the discovery of about 20 pairs of Pink-backed Pelican nesting in *Rhizophora* mangrove on the coast. The commonest bird of prey on the Farasan Islands is the Egyptian Vulture and there were probably in the region of

65 pairs present there in March 1985, a concentration which far exceeds population levels of this species in comparable areas on the nearby mainland. Also very common, and also an important scavenger, was the Brown-necked Raven. There appears to have been nothing known of passerines on the Islands until my visit. Others found were Black-crowned Finch Lark, Hoopoe Lark, Crested Lark, Black-capped Bulbul, Black Bush Chat and Graceful Warbler. The latter two species were especially numerous. The Graceful Warbler was interesting on account of its harsher call and much heavier bill, possibly a new race?

Peter Symens was able to visit these Islands in April and June 1988 and added several more species to the breeding and resident list. These include Black Kite which must be very scarce as I only saw one in March 1985 (whereas they were common on the nearby mainland at that time), Little Owl, White-browed Coucal and Namaqua Dove, all of which I missed but had expected. Peter also had a few House Sparrow, which I had specifically searched for but had not found. He also saw a Black-shouldered Kite, which is very rare anywhere in Arabia, and proved breeding of Purple Heron. This makes four breeding herons on the Islands, the others being the Reef Heron, Goliath Heron and the Green-backed Heron.

M.C.J.

RECENT REPORTS

Some records received for the Atlas stick out as being especially interesting on account of the species, location, habitat, period of breeding or the number of birds involved. The following are a selection of some of the more interesting, unexpected or unusual records received within the the last 12 months (some relate to earlier years). Records of unusual birds often get reported by more than one observer and although care is taken to credit records as appropriately as possible, it is regretted if the original finder of a rare bird is not identified here. Special thanks are due to David Foster and contributors to the Oman Central Record for the many records from Oman received over the last two years, some of which are featured here.

Lappet-faced Vulture Adults attending nests on southern edge of Nafud (FB30, FB31 & GA31) March 1988 (M.C.J.). Northernmost breeding records in Arabia.

Egyptian Vulture Two nests OA30, one with two young April 1987 (M. Elwonger). A rare breeding record from the Eastern Province of KSA.

Coot Young seen on lagoon south of Riyadh June 1987 (D.James, A.J.Stagg). First Riyadh breeding record.

Grey Francolin Seen in coastal region of central Oman (XB17) Sept 1986 (Oman Central Record). Southernmost record.

Houbara Two were seen to fly into each other and were killed north of Al Ajaiz (XA16) in central Oman July 1987 (T.Tear in *Oman Bird News* 3).

Black-winged Stilt Chicks seen east coast of UAE (WA27) April 1988 (J.A.Chapman, P.Hellyer & C.Richardson). First UAE breeding.

Pin-tailed Sandgrouse Many flocks, made up of pairs of birds, extreme northern Saudi Arabia (FA41) March 1988 (M.C.J.).

European Collared Dove At Khamasin (KB17) June 1988 and Afif (IB24) July 1988 (M.C.J.). New areas in KSA. NB The sight record of this species from near Taif, KSA, mentioned in *Phoenix* 4, p.3, has been withdrawn.

African Collared Dove Recorded Yanbu (EA25) May 1988 (B.Meadows). Furthest north record. Recorded 11 km east of Tathlith, KSA (JB16) June 1988 (M.C.J.). Furthest east record in central Arabia.

Turtle Dove Cooing Layla (MB21) Shudayq (IA17) and JA25, central KSA June & July 1988 (M.C.J.). New possible breeding areas. Also bred in UAE (VB27) June 1988 (C.Richardson).

Palm Dove A pair in square IB31, 110 km S.E. of Hail, KSA, more than 400 km from the nearest other proven records at Tayma (M.C.J.).

Namaqua Dove One near Quryat (YB23) June 1987 (*Oman Bird News* 3). First record from northern Oman.

Scops Owl *Otus scops*
Calling south of Riyadh (MB25) May 1988 (D.James). A potential breeding species in Arabia.

African Eagle Owl Very young bird seen square YA24, Jebel Akhdar, northern Oman (Oman Central Record). A new area for this species.

Bar-tailed Desert Lark Nested Bahrain, although young not reared, April 1987 (Bahrain Natural History Society). No previous breeding record for the island.

Black Bushchat New areas for this bird are southern Nafud (IB30) March 1988 (M.C.J.) and Kumdah (LA17) June 1988 (M.C.J.).

Nightingale *Luscinia megarhynchos* A male singing for long periods each day 1-7 May 1988 near Dubai, UAE (C.Richardson).

Black-headed Bush Shrike Two individuals seen at 1700m & 2060m at GB18 & HA17 respectively, southern Hedjaz, July 1988 (M.C.J.). Furthest north records and also at an unusually high altitude.

Great Grey Shrike Only a rare breeder on Bahrain. This year at least two pairs bred succesfully and one pair appears to have raised two broods (T.Nightingale).

Common Mynah Bird visiting nest in barn on east coast of UAE (WA27) April 1988 (J.A.D.Chapman & P.Hellyer). Visiting nest site in Taif, KSA (GA19) July 1988 (M.C.J. & P.Symens). Both new breeding areas for this introduced species.

Arabian Waxbill Four in Wadi al Sailah, southern Hedjaz (HA17) at 1700m July 1988 (M.C.J.). Northernmost record.

Trumpeter Finch Bred Bahrain May 1987 (Bahrain Natural History Society). First breeding record for the island.

PROGRESS SO FAR

Brown-necked Raven

Probably the most widespread bird in Arabia, the Brown-necked Raven, is found on some offshore islands, at the top of the highest mountains and in the remotest of deserts. Because of this wide range, records collected for this species give a good indication of the coverage so far achieved in the project. The up-to-date position for this species can be seen at Fig 5. A good number of squares have been blanked in and others upgraded since the similar map which appeared in *Phoenix* 4, but there are still large parts of Arabia which have not yet been touched by atlasers. If there is no Brown-necked Raven record for a square then the chances are there are very few other records from the locality. Active atlasers should, therefore, make special efforts to get to the blank squares and report their findings.

Although widespread and common in places, the habits and movements of the Brown-necked Raven are still poorly understood in many respects. One aspect of behaviour which has not yet been studied is its inclination to congregate near settlements in summer and early autumn, often in many hundreds. Why do they do it? Is food easier to come by at this time when conditions in the desert must be at their harshest? Do the rigours of the moult drive them to seek places of water and easy living? Similarly, where do they come from? Are they all making for the nearest town or is there a general drift southwards, or northwards, or in any other direction? One thing is sure that the deserts of central Arabia are virtually empty of Brown-necked Ravens in summer. For example, in July 1988 in central Saudi Arabia only one single pair were seen in the 500km of desert between Zalim (IA22) and Shagra (LA27), except for one congregation of 40 at Dawadimi (pers.obs.)

Egyptian Vulture

A not-quite-so-widespread species in Arabia. Compare distribution (Fig 6) to the records collected during the same period for the Brown-necked Raven (Fig 5). Note especially the general absence of this vulture from northern

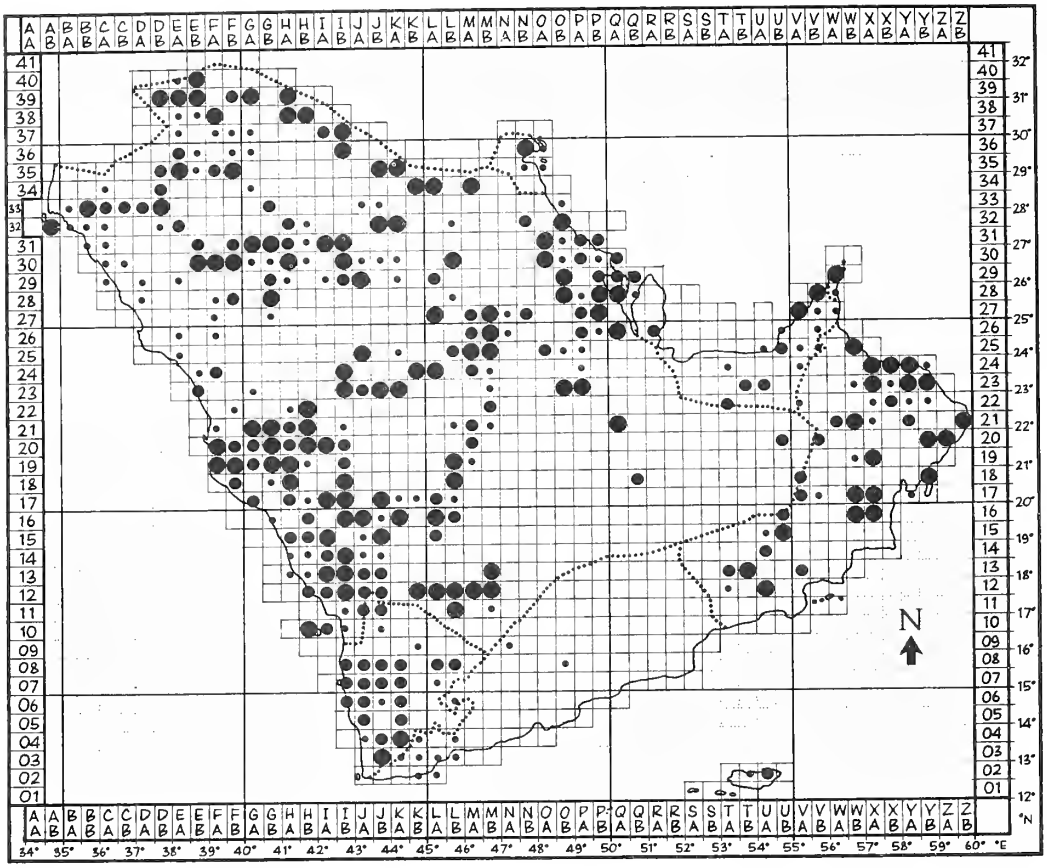

Fig 5 Brown-necked Raven: records to date.
● Confirmed breeding
● Probable breeding
• Other records

Arabia (the Kuwaiti records are probably migrants), the Empty Quarter and the very restricted range in eastern Saudi Arabia.

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NEW BOOKS

This column aims to review all those books that are either relevant in some way to the ABBA project or deal with an aspect of the Arabian environment. Most titles can be found for sale in good bookshops in Arabia, Europe or North America but in cases of difficulty write to the author, publisher or the distributor shown. If ordering through an agent or from a library quote the ISBN number. Information is also sought from readers on new titles not yet dealt with.

A New List of the Birds of Masirah Island, Sultanate of Oman by T.D.Rogers (1988)

Many Arabian ornithologists have never heard of Masirah Island but it is a very significant island, both in terms of size (it's as big as Bahrain) and its ornithology. It lies off the coast of the Sultanate of Oman. Small when compared to the land mass of Arabia (65 x 16 kilometers and only two Atlas squares) but it figures largely in the annals of Oman ornithology. It is, perhaps, the most intensively watched corner of south east Arabia having an attraction for birds and birders like Fair Isle in northern Britain. No less than 260 species have been recorded on this, almost tree-less, largely barren, slightly rocky island. Most of the species are migrants or visitors of one form or another and only 18 species have bred. The specialities of this island are sea birds and waders, of which large numbers of a vast range occur. On top of this, rarities from both Africa and India provide highlights to the birding year. The main part of the book, as one would expect, are the species accounts of the birds which have occurred. These notes are proceeded by a general description of the island, its climate and vegetation and habitats as well as an account of the ornithological year and hints on when and where birds can be seen. The species accounts themselves are provided with a status code and a reference number (which equates to the ABBA number) and a narrative on the records, occurrence and status, i.e. dates, places and numbers of birds seen. Individual species coverage varies between a single line and about nine lines per bird; the average is about three lines. Following the species accounts are the *de riguer* accompaniments of any check list, that is the 'unacceptable list', a list of observers and those species accepted too late to get in the main manuscript! There are also a bibliography and indexes. More detailed appendices deal with wader accounts (up to 19,000 regularly are counted) as well as rainfall and temperature. This book is very good value and well recommended to those interested in Arabian sea and shore birds, Oman and those who merely collect check lists.

Card covers. 56 pages, 147 x 210 mm. £2 (1 Omani Riyal). Published by the Oman Bird Records Committee. Distributed by the Historical Association of Oman, P.O.Box 6941, Ruwi, Oman.

A Field Guide to the Waders of Britain and Europe with North Africa and the Middle East by P.Colston & P.Burton (1988)

Waders are an attractive group of birds but some species are amongst the most difficult to identify of any birds. The observer in Arabia could come across any of the 63 generally accepted species (plus another dozen unsubstantiated) on the Arabian list and might well be confused. This book is about all the breeding waders of Europe, North Africa and the Middle East and includes regular visitors to these regions, plus a few rarities that have only occurred on a few occasions and one that is believed extinct. A total of 83 species are dealt with in detail, with references to a further dozen or so. The authors claim that their book fills a gap between the various whole-world wader guides which are necessarily rather skimpy in coverage of individual species and tomes such as *Birds of the Western Palearctic* which are far too cumbersome to take into the field. In line with most other books that claim to be about Middle East birds, this book does not include much of the Arabian Peninsula. The only part of Arabia that is covered is the bit north of a line between Kuwait and the southern tip of Sinai, i.e. above about 27°N. This is a curious division as, by any definition, biological, geographical, or political, Arabia is part of the Middle East. One

suspects that a shadowy cartel of ornithological publishers have conspired to exclude central and southern Arabia from the Middle East, because it would make their thumb-nail maps of species distribution an awkward shape! This book is much more than a field guide. The species accounts are very thorough and give detailed and authoritative information, voice, habitat, distribution, movements, feeding, social and breeding behaviour, as well as nest, eggs and young. The text is, unfortunately, rather small and one gains the impression that the book has been condensed to its present size from a larger format as a production economy. The names of each bird are given in Dutch, German, Swedish, French and Spanish, as well as the English and scientific name, and there are indexes to these names. Each species account is illustrated by a drawing but the main illustrations are a set of 23 truly beautiful colour plates by Phillip Burton. A twenty fourth plate gives an illustrated key to the main families and even this is to a standard not usually reached by the main illustrations in other good field guides. One especially attractive plate is reserved for the downy chicks of 18 species. Unlike the text, the plates do not give the impression that they have been cramped down from something larger and are particularly attractive with, on average, one or two large paintings for each species, and two or three other small sketches of birds in flight or in different plumages, etc. The Ruff gets 17 paintings. There are 52 distribution maps (6 per page) showing, where appropriate, the breeding range and/or winter range of each species. These are generally very good but like other breeding distribution maps of Eurasia are extremely detailed in Western Europe but get vaguer and vaguer going eastwards, so that central Russia tends to be either all black (species occurs) or all white (species does not occur). This attractive book is recommended to all those who regularly watch shores and wetlands in Arabia or merely enjoy a well illustrated field guide.

Hardback. 224 pages, 132 x 200mm. £9.95. Published by Hodder & Stoughton, 47 Bedford Square, London WC1B 3DP. ISBN 0 340 39936 8.

The Birds of Ancient Egypt (Volume 1 of *The Natural History of Egypt*) by P.F.Houlihan and S.M.Goodman (1986)

The ancient Egyptians reached a peak of representational bird art not surpassed for some 3000 years until the Renaissance in Europe. This book is about the carvings, paintings and other artefacts of birds which are abundantly scattered through the tombs and other monuments of ancient Egypt. Birds were very important to the ancient Egyptians being a source of food and of religious and symbolic status, they were placed in tombs as victuals for the dead, and were hunted and kept in aviaries by the nobility. The aim of this book is to provide a systematic survey of all the bird life depicted in the art of ancient Egypt and to sketch the role of birds in the secular and religious affairs, from the early dynastic period, approximately 3000 BC, to the days of the Roman Empire about 395 AD. It also attempts to compare the present distribution of species with those at the time of the Pharaohs. As might be expected a good many of the species covered are not found in present day Egypt. The book is arranged with an extensive reference list at the front (almost 600 titles) which comprises an extensive bibliography of both ancient and modern Egyptian birds and, one suspects, a great part of the study of Egyptology. This is followed by accounts of all the bird species specifically identified (139 pages) amounting to some 72 species or groups (Bats are dealt with as a tail piece). Each species account, which is illustrated by one or more photos of actual art work depicting the species, is divided into notes on the criteria the authors have used to identify each species, distribution, including the present day distribution of the species in the Middle East and Egypt and comments. The comments paragraph deals with, for example, the frequency with which species are illustrated, art techniques used and the degree of correctness in the illustration. There are two appendices, the first of which lists some 54 species for which bird remains have been found in tombs or have been mummified. The second is a full check list of the present day birds of Egypt, detailing nomenclature, occurrence, status and distribution and very often the Egyptian Arabic name and other notes. In all some 408 species are dealt with. There is an index of English and scientific names, 199 text figures (mostly black and white photographs) and one colour plate.

Laminated card covers. 221 pages, 237 x 203mm. £28 Distributed by La Haule Books Ltd., West Lodge, La Haule, Jersey, Channel Islands, U.K. Published by Aris and Phillips, Warminster, England. ISBN 085668 - 283 - 7.

Bottleneck Areas for Migratory Birds in the Mediterranean Region by R.G.Bijlsma (1987)

This book is an assessment of the problems of bird migration in the Mediterranean areas with some recommendations for action and is published as ICBP Study Report No.18. Twice every year some 5,000,000,000 birds move between Africa and Europe and back. Most of these are passerine species moving on a wide front, however, certain birds, mainly soaring species such as storks and raptors, concentrate their movement at well known sites around the Mediterranean. These places of concentration are as well known to hunters as they are to ornithologists and unfortunately many birds are shot and caught during their period of exposure and vulnerability as they pass these sites twice each year. The report documents 18 places in 14 countries around the Mediterranean, from Gibraltar in the west to Turkey and to Hurgada on the Red Sea in the East. For each site information is given on its importance, the numbers and routes of birds migrating there, changes in status of species over the years, threats both present and future, and conservation action. Each site account is backed up by an extensive list of references. It seems that Lebanon is the blackest spot for birds moving through the Middle East, with Malta and Cyprus a close second. The report contains 36 maps and diagrams and 30 tables.

Card covers. 135 pages, 207 x 292mm. £4. Available from ICBP, 32 Cambridge Road, Girton, Cambridge, CB3 0PJ, England.

Threatened Birds of Africa and Related Islands by N.J.Collar & S.N.Stuart (1985)

And now the bad news..... Africa is a vast continent with the highest population explosion in any part of the world. This book focuses on the 173 species of birds in that continent which are thought to be extinct, endangered, vulnerable, or under some degree of threat. It is a call for action in respect of some of the most poorly known bird species in the world. The text primarily concentrates on the birds; it is not about conserving habitats and ecosystems as such but the authors are at pains to point out that establishing biotope reserves and preserving original habitat for these, mainly African endemic species, is the most effective key to their long term survival. The book is the first part of the third edition of the *ICBP/IUCN Bird Red Data Book* and offers a totally new format to such works (other regional parts are in preparation). The introductory chapters set the African scene (a map of the continent would have been very useful but is lacking), and explains the methods of compiling and publishing Red Data Book information, and the categories of threat referred to. Of the species that are dealt with in detail, there are accounts under the headings of distribution, population, ecology, threats, conservation measures taken, conservation measures proposed, remarks, and references. For many species, so little is known that barely a page is filled, including references. Coverage varies greatly, however, and for the Northern Bald Ibis we find that there are 44 pages of information. This species is, incidentally, the only bird dealt with in the book

which also breeds outside of the African continent. The Arabian connection with this book is that it covers the island of Socotra (PDRY) situated off the Horn of Africa. On Socotra there are a number of very poorly known endemic species which, because of the restricted size of the island, are automatically a cause for concern. The Socotra birds dealt with are the Socotra Cisticola, which is unaccountably uncommon, the Socotra Cormorant, endemic to the shores of southern Arabia and the Arabian Gulf, Socotra Warbler, Socotra Sunbird, Socotra Bunting, Socotra Grackle (Starling) and Forbes-Watson's Swift. The latter is one of the candidates for the, as yet unidentified, swift breeding on coastal cliffs of southern Arabia. Illustrations within the book are limited to 12 exquisite, full colour, portraits by Norman Arlott of some of the rarest birds in the world. Some of these plates illustrate species that have never been illustrated before in colour and others that have not been seen for decades. There is endless scope in this book for those planning serious expeditions to the continent in search of species whose status is very poorly known. This book is recommended to all those seriously interested in African birds or to the visiting ornithologist who intends to venture into remote areas.

Hardback. 796 pages, 164 x 238mm. £24.00 (post free). Published by the International Council for Bird Preservation, 32 Cambridge Road, Girton, Cambridge, CB3 0PJ, England. ISBN 2 88032 604 4.

The Skuas by R.W.Furness (1987)

"The first Pomarines arrived on the 24 July 1987 and built up to more than 60 by the 26 August. The first Arctics appeared on the 30 June ....". This is not an extract from the log of some draughty Hebridean observatory but North Beach, Masirah Island, Oman (J.Bryan, *Oman Bird News* 3, 1988). These two skuas are regular around the shores of Arabia and occur erratically inland at all seasons. The Long-tailed Skua has been recorded on several occasions in the Red and Arabian Seas whilst the South Polar Skua visits the Indian Ocean and Arabian Sea in the summer, the Antarctic winter. Surprising as it may be to some, a book on the skuas is very relevant to the bookshelf of Arabian ornithologists.

Skuas are fascinating birds to watch as they agilely chase and harry any gull or tern which they think may be carrying food. The author has been fascinated by them for many years and this thoroughgoing, authoritative, and attractive work is the result of his labours. His long chapter on the migration and movement of the six species that he recognises explains the rather peculiar occurrences of representatives of this group in the Arabian area. Three of the northern Skuas, the Long-tailed, the Pomarine, and the Arctic, have a circumpolar breeding distribution whilst they all winter in the southern oceans. Many of them, it transpires, must cross the central Eurasian landmass en route to winter quarters in the Indian Ocean or the South Atlantic. On the other hand, the South Polar Skua, a close relative (some say a race) of the northern Great Skua, visits the Arabian Sea during the southern winter. Indeed, in other parts of its range, it goes right to the north of the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans and claims the world record for the longest migration of any species. The book tells us of a bird ringed in the Antarctic which was recovered by an eskimo in the Arctic. Other major chapters in the book deal with breeding distribution and populations, behaviour, food and feeding and pollution and conservation, whilst subjects particularly relevant to skuas, such as reversed sexual dimorphism, kleptoparasitism, and plumage polymorphism, are dealt with in particular detail. This book is embellished by 30 black and white photographs, 35 vignettes (by John Busby), 100 text diagrams (including maps, graphs and histograms) and 65 tables of data. It is supported by a very thorough list of references (over 400) and a good index. An excellent monograph from the renowned Poyser stable.

Hardback. 363 pages, 164 x 240mm. £18.00. Published by T.& A.D.Poyser, Townhead House, Calton, Waterhouses, Staffordshire, U.K. ISBN 0 85661 046 1.

Population Ecology of Raptors by I.Newton (1979)

This book immediately became a classic among books on raptors, and its many accolades have included *British Birds* "Book of the Year" 1980. It is concerned with all aspects of population regulation in diurnal birds of prey, their social behaviour, breeding, movements, mortality, threats and conservation. Very well written, its style being authoritative and lucid. The text is full of maps, graphs and diagrams (50 text figures) which are easily interpreted and some of which are classics in their own right. For example, the figure showing the eggshell thinning of Sparrowhawk eggs from 1870 to 1975 and identifying the abrupt drop in thickness in 1947 when DDT was widely introduced. Another map which shows correlations between Buzzard numbers and density of gamekeepers in 1954 tells a whole story of its own. The main text is supported by 68 tables in an appendix, a very thorough 16 page index and a most comprehensive bibliography of 750 references. The author has, in fact, produced a synopsis of all the good work published worldwide on raptors in this one cover. Information is largely drawn from British material but there is much relevant to raptors in North America and Africa as well as in many other parts of the world. Illustrated with lovely line drawings by Jim Gammie which are scattered, uncaptioned, throughout the book. In addition there are 32 black and white plates (up to 4 photos per plate). This book is essential for anyone seriously interested in raptors.

Hardback. 399 pages, 162 x 240mm. £16.00 Published by T.& A.D.Poyser, Townhead House, Calton, Waterhouses, Staffordshire, ST10 3JQ, U.K. ISBN 0.85661.023.2

Biological diversity in North Africa, the Middle East and South West Asia : A Directory of organisations and institutions by K.Montague and B.Bruun (1987)

A catalogue, by country, of all the environmental, conservation, biological, and natural science institutes, organisations and societies to be found in the Middle East - or, to be precise, those that could be found by the authors. The book has the objective of publishing details of these bodies to facilitate the exchange of information between them and for individuals and organisations outside of the Middle East to make direct contact with research bodies and societies that may help them. The authors contacted some 500 organisations in the area of coverage and although the response rate was nowhere near complete, the authors do promise that future editions of the directory will be more comprehensive and authoritative. The countries covered are those from Morrocco to Pakistan, including Malta, Cyprus, Turkey, all north African states bordering the Mediterranean and the whole of Arabia. Data scheduled for each country includes basic information on location, area, language(s) and population, as well as the international conventions which it has signed, details of national parks and reserves, government and non-government conservation and environmental organisations and academic institutions specifically engaged in environmental/biological research. One gap apparent in this very valuable resource is that no organisations which have a general interest for the whole of the Middle East are listed. For example, the Ornithological Society of the Middle East is nowhere to be found and, worst of all, the Atlas of the Breeding Birds of Arabia is not mentioned either. Also absent are those international organisations which have on-going environmental projects in the Middle East such as IUCN, ICBP and the World Wildlife Fund. The directory is published by the Holy Land Conservation Fund with the assistance of the US Agency for International Development and the US Fish and Wildlife Service.

Card covers. 134 pages, 215 x 278mm. $10

(including postage). Available from HLCF, c/o 969 Park Avenue, New York, NY10028, U.S.A.

Encyclopedia of Indian Natural History edited by R.E.Hawkins (1986)

For those who already have the compact edition of the *Hand book of the Birds of India and Pakistan* here is another nice big book to put alongside it! This magnificent undertaking marks the centenary (1883-1983) of the Bombay Natural History Society, Asia's oldest and premier natural history society. It has been specially published by Oxford University Press. It is a book which the Society can be justly proud of, being the product of the work of some 100 or so different authors who have prepared in all approximately 550 articles. Each article illustrates one aspect of the hugely diverse and rich natural history, wildlife and biology of the Indian sub-continent. The Society's area of interest represented by this book is India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Burma, Nepal and Sri Lanka. Articles are of course all arranged alphabetically but there is a very helpful and useful cross checking index. There are some 22 main subject headings dealt with including anatomy, behaviour, climatology, conservation, disease and geography as well as all the regular divisions of animals and plants. The publishers, as is usual, make claims of 'lavish' illustrations, and in this case it is justified. There are 40 high gloss plates (34 of which are in full colour) each of which comprise up to four sub-plates, plus about 800 black and white photos and a similar number of line drawings in the text. Two coloured end papers show the Indian region and an evolutionary tree of life. Some of the black and white half tones are unfortunately a little poorly printed but not enough to mar either the enormous achievement or considerable attraction of this book. It is a wonderful thing to browse through and is highly recommended to anyone who is going to or is interested in nature of the Indian region, whether they are a specialist or a generalist. All will find it a very readable and attractive reference source for all manner of aspects of natural history.

Hardback. 631 pages, 217 x 293mm. £25. Published by Oxford University Press, Walton Street, Oxford, OX2 6DP, U.K. ISBN 0-19-561623-5.

Mammals of the Southern Gulf by C.Gross (1987)

Probably one of the most attractive books on any aspect of Arabian wildlife to come on the market in recent years. It deals mainly with the larger mammals of eastern and southern parts of the Arabian Gulf states. Subjects include gazelles, wild goats, wild sheep and carnivores that roam, or to be more precise used to roam, the Emirates. Like all accounts of mammals in Arabia this book lurches from one tale of woe and extinction of a magnificent mammal to another depressing story of exploitation and massacre. There is no large mammal in the whole of the southern Gulf area that has not been exploited or exterminated and shot at on sight in the last few decades. The book tells of the near catastrophe of the Arabian Oryx, details the extremely rare and intriguing records of ibex, wild sheep, wild goats, hyaena, jackal, wolf, leopard and lynx that have occurred in the area. Now all are so rare that if one person gets a glimpse of just one of these animals in several years of field work he should count himself lucky. Against all the odds, however, the author has collected together many notes and photographs of these animals from a variety of sources and presented them to beautifully illustrate a very readable non-specialist introduction to the subject. Even his colour pictures of the skulls of various Arabian mammals are attractively done. Unfortunately, due to the rarity of many species many photos have had to be taken in collections in captivity, however the author has been extremely careful to avoid pictures of bars, chains and the like and presents his subjects in as natural a situation as possible. One hideous picture of a dead Caracal Lynx hanging in a tree in the northern Emirates is extremely effective when set beside a picture of a beautifully sleek, live animal and makes us all realise what a stupid thing it is to shoot such creatures. The book also deals with some contenders for the future wildlife of Arabia such as the donkey, which now runs feral in many parts of the peninsula. Surprisingly, the camel has never become feral in Arabia although it is now wild in many other desert areas of the world. A few pages are devoted to the smaller mammals including the porcupine and other rodents. There is a tail piece on dolphins and dugongs by Anthony Preen. Christian Gross has spent some eight years in the

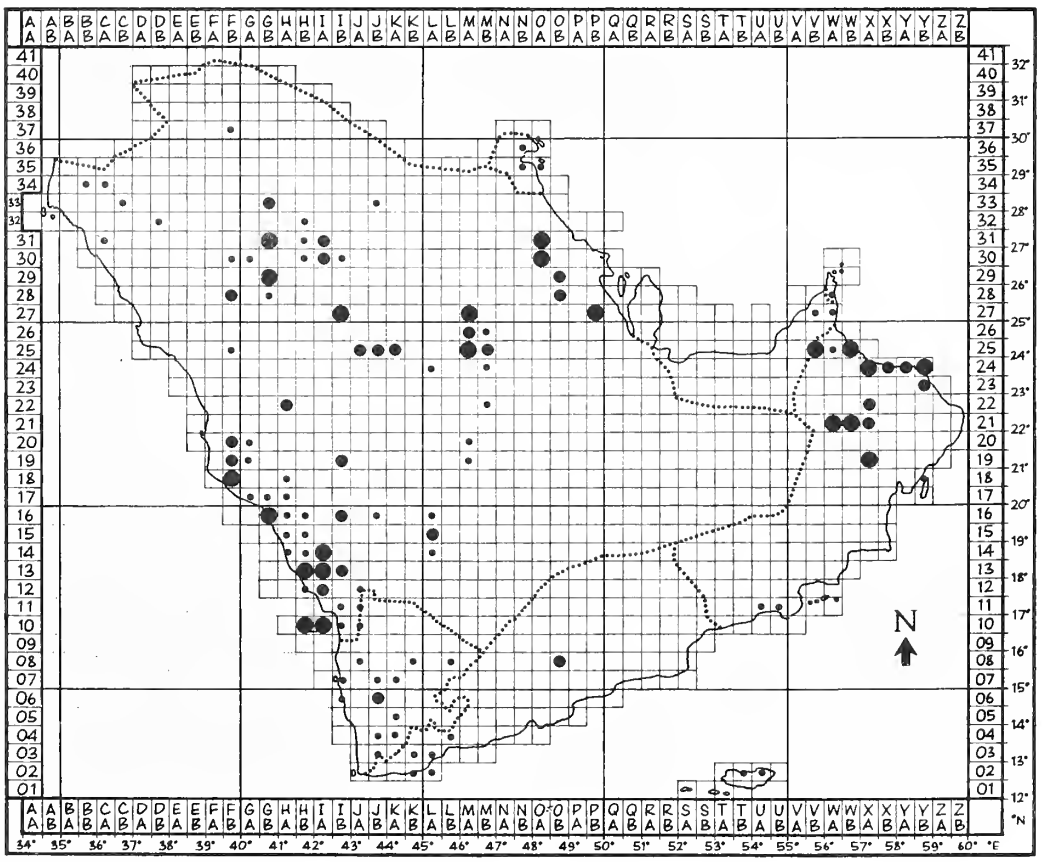

Fig 6 Egyptian Vulture: records to date.
● Confirmed breeding
● Probable breeding
• Other records

Emirates studying the wildlife of the area which, in the mammals, is a wonderful mixture of African, Asian and European elements. A very attractive and recommended book.

Laminated card covers. 80 pages, 198 x 272mm. Price not known. Published by Motivate Publishing, P.O.Box 2331, Dubai, United Arab Emirates. This is a title in the Arabian heritage series and is published with the support and encouragement of Shell Markets (Middle East) Ltd.

Sharks of Arabia by J.E.Randall (1986)

Forty four species of shark live or, should one say, lurk in the seas and gulfs surrounding the Arabian Peninsula. They are part of a larger family of about 350 species worldwide which inhabit all seas from the tropics to the polar oceans, as small dogfish to huge whale sharks, from the deepest troughs to surface waters. Some are speedy, some are sluggish, some feed on sea urchins, some sieve plankton and others, as we know them best, attack much larger prey. Some lay eggs and some give birth to live young. A very diverse group of animals indeed whose common name strikes a mixture of fear and fascination in all of us humans. The author is a marine biologist with forty years experience in the tropics, he tells us of the evolutionary history of sharks, their anatomy (including some very peculiar features of their skin and teeth) and interactions with man. There are some very interesting statistics in the latter section. Did you know that there are, worldwide, less than 100 shark attacks each year? More attacks, proportionally, are made at night than during the daytime; 62% of attacks are in water 1.5 metres or less deep; 90% of victims are on or near the surface and swimming; strangely, 92% of human victims are males (apparently reflecting the male's more ambitious and energetic marine pursuits); victims in light coloured swimming costumes are preferred to dark ones and bathers and snorkellers with open wounds are definitely more attractive than others. The most important part of the book deals with the classification of each of the species occurring around Arabia, giving a diagnosis of each family and the characteristics of each species, providing identification features, remarks on distribution, food, habits, reproduction, and, the bit we all want to know about, the degree of danger that they represent to man. Illustrated by 98 text figures, half of which are full colour photos, about one-third black and white photos with the remainder line drawings. The latter include illustrations of the dentition of many species which is one of the very few methods of obtaining a positive identification, for example of a shark that might be hooked fishing or found on the beach. This book will be attractive to anyone interested in the marine environment or who enjoys a gripping read.

Hardback. 148 pages, 215 x 302mm. £26.00. Published by Immel Publishing, Ely House, 37 Dover Street, London W1X 3RB, U.K. ISBN 0.907151.09.4.

Insects of Eastern Arabia by D.H.Walker & A.R.Pittaway (1987)

Those fascinated by bugs and creepy crawlies or with a kindling interest in Arabian insects will, until now, have been unable to progress beyond the interested-but-ignorant stage because there have been no relevant reference sources. It is true there are one or two books on butterflies of Arabia, but so far, for all the other branches of this huge class of animals there are no books at all. One's only references are esoteric papers on confusing family groups, tucked away in obscure journals. This attractive little book changes all that - it is a well researched, well illustrated introduction to all the insects likely to be found in eastern Arabia. Above all, however, it is a very readable book and even those with not the slightest interest in this class of animals, would find it hard to put down without a thorough flick through. The book covers that area of eastern and northern Arabia drawn roughly by a line from Jordan through the Nejd Plateau, west of Riyadh, to the Arabian Sea, including all the Gulf States and northern Oman. It will have a special appeal to families, especially those with parents wanting to encourage nature-minded children. This guide allows everyone to really get to grips with the wildlife of Arabia without ever moving from the shade of a tree. Introductory chapters are kept to the necessary minimum, e.g. the classification and anatomy of insects. Thankfully high-brow language is avoided throughout. Altogether, some 366 species are dealt with, of 309 genera in 92 families. The authors concentrate on the larger, more apparent species and groups and so beetles, bees, flies and dragonflies are very well represented. About a third of the text is devoted to that most attractive and noticeable group, the butterflies and moths. Each species account (short paragraph) includes the scientific names and an English name, as well as habits, habitat, food and other notes. Alongside each species, there is a thumbnail map of the Arabian Peninsula, showing the known distribution of each species for the whole of the peninsula, not just in eastern Arabia. Against the map, details are given of the months of occurrence of the adult stage of the insect. All species dealt with are illustrated very attractively by A.J.Walker, usually life-size, and often with larval and/or pupal stages with some habitat vignettes included in the text. This book is recommended to everyone with an interest in nature in Arabia. Its simplicity of approach, yet authoritative handling of each species, will be found a pleasure by the absolute beginner and the more serious entomologist who is new to Arabia.

Card covers. 191 pages, 115 x 186mm. £6.95. Published by Macmillan, Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, RG21 2XS, U.K. ISBN 0 333 43214 2.

Underwater Guide: Red Sea Fishes by H.Debelius (1987)

This guide is a collection of some 300 or so colour photographs of Red Sea fishes taken in their natural habitat. It is a beautiful introduction to Red Sea fishes both for the ichthyologist and the scuba diver. It makes no claims to be fully authoritative as it covers only 150 species of the approximately 1,000 total species occurring in the Red Sea. It does, however, concentrate on the larger and medium size species that most scuba divers would expect to see around coral reefs. Text, in both German and English, is minimal and limited to a few sentences on the habits and food of each species as well as warnings about any particular dangers they present to scuba divers. The species accounts are embellished by pictograms of the habitat, daily period of activity and depth of distribution of each. Introductory paragraphs deal with the physical features of a fish, a short introduction to the natural history exploration of the Red Sea and notes on the structure of the Red Sea coast line. Recommended.

Card covers. 167 pages, 147 x 210 mm. DM44. Published by Verlag Stephanie Naglschmid, Augustenstr.61a, D-7000 Stuttgart, West Germany. Also available from Underwater Photography Magazine, 4 Greyhound Road, London W6 8NX, U.K. ISBN 3-925342-18-4.

Red Sea Invertebrates by P.Vine (1986)

More than any other recent title, this book epitomises the beauty, colour and diversity of life in the Red Sea. Every opening of the book has very high quality, full colour plates of startling, fantastic, even surreal, life forms. Some, such as the nudibranchs (sea slugs), fanworms and corals, are truly unbelievable when portrayed in full colour close-up photography. Apart from some books on shells (see *Phoenix* 4), there are no other books which cover Red Sea invertebrates so this title fills a very large gap. The author's approach to the subject is along taxonomic lines. Obviously, with the huge numbers of invertebrate species in the Red Sea (e.g. at least 1,000 molluscs and 200 corals alone), coverage can only be superficial. The basic taxonomic unit chosen for much of the text is the family. A generalised description, habit,

and habitats are given for those families mentioned, and as an illustration to the family, notes are also presented on individual species. Among the groups of animals dealt with in the book are sponges, jellyfish, corals, anemones, vermiform animals (worms), crustaceans, molluscs, starfish, sea urchins and sea slugs. Each group is dealt with most professionally by the author, a marine biologist with 20 years experience of diving on coral reefs. Throughout the book there are many line drawings by Jane Stark. These include 43 numbered text figures and probably another 200 other drawings, all beautifully and technically executed. It is complete with a glossary of specialist terms, a reference list for further reading (200 odd titles) and a thorough index. This book will need to be on the bookshelf of any self respecting Red Sea scuba diver, as well as those who just like to beach comb and investigate rock pools. Highly recommended.

Hardback. 224 pages, 220 x 300mm. £39.50. Published by Immel Publishing, Ely House, 37 Dover Street, London W1X 3RB. ISBN 9.907151.11.6.

Golden Days in the Desert: Wild Flowers of Saudi Arabia by B.A.Lipscombe-Vincett (1984)

A full-colour introduction to some of the commoner plants found throughout Saudi Arabia. The author makes no pretension to science but presents her subject through extremely attractive, artistic photographs. The book is arranged, generally, under the different habitats to be found in this huge Kingdom and the plants peculiar to each of these general habitats. On the hot, dusty Tihama, which is often very saline but in other places surprisingly well watered, one finds the beautiful *Delonix elata* tree, the grotesque *Adenium obesum* as well as the wierd Euphorbias which characterise this region. In the nearby Asir Mountains, cool and wet and luxuriant, there are the juniper forests, the delicate little Abyssinian rose, aloes, lilies and, surprisingly gladioli. Also the many aromatic herbs that make a visit to that part of the world so memorable. Travelling north in the Hijaz and Midian regions one moves into acacia dominant zones, with their attractive *Loranthus* parasites and the special plants of the sandstone districts such as *Silene*. Here also are the peculiar *Caraluma* succulents which are pollinated when flies are attracted to them by their foetid smell. One is surprised to learn that perhaps the most common plant of this region, the attractive little Mexican poppy, is, in fact, an introduction. In the Nejd region, predominantly of limestones, typical species occurring are the sodum apple *Calotropis procera*, the *Rhaziya stricta* (looks a bit like a small oleander and is equally poisonous) the *Maerua crassifolia* tree, which attracts clouds of butterflies when in bloom, and *Pancratium* and irises which spring up after desert rains and are everybody's favourite. Plants typical of the Eastern Province, include the parasitic *Cistanche* which has the apt common name of desert hyacinth, the peculiar bright green mat, dodder, which climbs over small herbs as well as several salt-loving plants found near the coast. At the end there is a very helpful bibliography and index.

Hardback. 172 pages, 216 x 304mm. £28. Immel Publishing, Ely House, 37 Dover Street, London W1X 3RB. ISBN 0.907151.22.1.

Key Environments: Red Sea by A.J.Edwards and S.M.Head (1987)

Reliable information is essential in combatting exploitation and pollution but the total available information on any one finite area is usually scattered around a multitude of books, reports and records of individuals in many different disciplines. Very rarely do we find a collection of environmental information on one geographical area. This series prepared by IUCN in collaboration with Pergamon Press aims to remedy that. The Red Sea is a major environment of global ecological importance. This book is a thorough survey of the fauna and flora of the Red Sea basin with suggestions for effective management and, where appropriate, conservation strategies. After a lengthy introduction to the ecology of the area covering such subjects as faunal affinities and endemics as well as the scientific exploration of the region, there are 18 major essays contributed by experts in their field. These chapters include basic geology, geography, climate, oceanography, fisheries, pollution, human settlement and conservation. There are twelve chapters on animal groups ranging from plankton and deep trough benthic animals to corals, molluscs and other invertebrates. There are also chapters on the vertebrates. The bird chapter covers 23 pages and is divided into sub-sections on the ecology of Red Sea seabirds, status and distribution of species as well as threats to seabirds, including exploitation, pollution and habitat destruction. The book is illustrated throughout with black and white photographs (about 200) as well as many maps, tables, charts and sketches. The whole has been very expertly put together and is extremely well referenced. Very interesting and recommended as a valuable reference to a wide range of readers including academics, environmentalists, conservationists, ecologists and geographers.

Hardback. 450 pages. 190 x 250 mm. £22. Available from Pergamon Press, Headington Hill Hall, Oxford, OX3 0BW, U.K. ISBN 0.08.028873.1

Fig 7 Olive Pigeon. A species new to Arabia, and possibly breeding. One of the fine line drawings by Ian Willis illustrating *Birds of the Middle East and North Africa*.

BIRD BOOKS IN ARABIC

Game Birds of the Arab World by Assad Serhal (1986)

A very nicely produced book with full colour fieldguide style illustrations taken from Arthur Singer's drawings for the *Country Life Guide to Birds of Britain and Europe*. The introductory chapters (30 pages) deal with government hunting organisations, the law concerning closed hunting seasons in Lebanon and 'ten commandments' for hunters. The definition of game bird for this book is somewhat wider than elsewhere and includes not only ducks, partridges, pigeons and sandgrouse but also rails, bustards, several waders, Nightjar, all the larks, starlings and thrushes. Each of the 60 species accounts has five sub headings dealing with general distribution in the Arab world, a more detailed distribution in Lebanon and Syria, description, breeding, and habits and food. There is a strong bias in the species dealt with to those occurring in Lebanon, as might be expected from a book prepared in that country and various introduced game bird species are also covered. The text is entirely in Arabic but English common names are given and a systematic list in the appendix gives English, Arabic and scientific names. There is also an

Arabic index and English bibliography. It is a pity to see such unsporting birds as larks and thrushes included in this book as fair game and a book such as this is a little surprising as a subject for publication by a nature society. However it is a very useful and attractive book and one which many Arabic readers interested in ornithology will want to have on their bookshelf. It has been published with the support of the U.S.Fish and Wildlife Service Office of International Affairs and the Holy Land Conservation Fund.

Laminated card covers. 182 pages, 161 x 228mm. Price not known. Published by the Society for the Protection of Nature and Natural Resources in Lebanon, P.O.Box 11-5665, Beirut, Lebanon.

NEW PERIODICALS

Zoology in the Middle East, Volume 1 (1986) R.Kinzelbach and M.Kasparek (Editors)

Recognising the inadequacies of existing journals which cater for animal life in the Middle East the editors have introduced this new international publication to publish zoological papers for the whole Middle East area. The Middle East is unfortunately - or probably deliberately - not defined by the editors but seems to include the whole of Arabia, North Africa and east to Iran. The first volume aims to present short communications on morphology, zoogeography, faunistics, systematics, animal biology and ecology. Papers concerning vertebrates dominate the first issue but in future issues it hopes to cover all branches of zoology. This periodical is clearly something of a gamble by the editors. One must wait to see whether the scientific community supports its launch by a supply of papers for future issues and subscribes to it. It is not linked to a society or any definable organisation. The contents of the first issue are rather incestuous as no less than 17 of 32 vertebrate papers have been written by one or other of the editors. Professor Kinzelbach has also contributed six additional papers out of a total of 17, on various invertebrate groups. The short communication format of the journal is easily readable and one can enjoy skipping through a broad spectrum of interesting notes on, for example, historical records of the lion and gazelles in Turkey, sperm whales in the eastern Mediterranean, porcupines in the Middle East and newts in Anatolia. There are 14 papers on birds, 12 concerning Turkey and mainly about rare or unusual records of individual species in that country. One documents the Brown-necked Raven first appearing in eastern Turkey in 1985. This first volume of this new journal is prepared to a high standard with numerous text figures and photographs. If it is broad based enough it will be subscribed to by a wide spectrum of those interested in zoology, the environment and conservation in the Middle East.

Card covers. 156 pages, 225 x 155mm. Published by Max Kasparek Verlag, Bleichstrasse 1, 6900 Heidelberg, West Germany. ISBN 3-925064-02-8.

Asian Wetland News

Wetlands are not immediately associated with Arabia, however, Arabia is very important for the feeding and resting of many thousands of migrant and wintering waders and wetland birds. Of the 63 species of waders, 23 ducks and 26 species of large wading birds which have occurred in Arabia, a significant proportion of the world population of some pass over the peninsula each year. Indeed, in recent years Arabia has been the focus of several coastal wader studies which have revealed enormous numbers of birds using coastal areas. Inland wetlands are limited and mostly man-made, but they are so attractive to birds that a number of local initiatives have started to conserve and enhance these sites for birds. The Asian Wetland News is the twice yearly organ of the Asian Wetland Bureau. The AWB was founded in 1987 being mainly spawned from the work of 'Interwader', the East Asian Pacific Shorebird Study Project. The new organisation has widened its scope considerably to include interest in fisheries, botany, environmental assessment and education, as well as providing services to help government and non-government agencies formulating environment policy and the management of wetland reserves. Although the AWB's main base and activities so far have focused on South-East Asia it seeks to have an interest in all wetland issues throughout the Asian continent, including Arabia. The first issue is dated January 1988 and contains a round-up of all the issues and projects that the AWB is currently involved in, plus articles on wader migration in South-East Asia, the Ramsar Convention on international wetlands, conservation in Sarawak, Nordmann's Greenshank *Tringa guttifer* and the birds of Lake Shengjin in China. It is especially pleasing to see a good number of notes and articles on wetlands and birds in China, a country which, until very recently, was a blank on everybody's map. Issue No.1 has 20 pages (A4 size), with full colour photos on the back and front covers and a number of illustrations inside. Subscription rates for those outside of Asia are US$10 (Air Mail) or US$7 (Surface). It seems that the newsletter is issued free to those resident in Asia (including Arabia). Those interested should ask for a sample copy.

Address: Asian Wetland News, Asian Wetland Bureau, c/o Institute of Advanced Studies (IPT), University of Malaya, Lembah Pantai, 59100 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

Fig 8 76,000 Steppe Eagles crossed the Bab al Mandab from Arabia to Africa in Autumn 1987. See 'Expedition News'.

Tauraco

The first issue of *Tauraco*, billed as the journal of Afro-tropical ornithology, appeared in March 1988 and included papers on Palearctic-African warbler migration, ringing recoveries of migrants in Africa, taxonomy of tauracos, the avifauna of Angola and Kenya and Indian Ocean island birds. The journal, which is planned as a twice-yearly event, will publish articles in English and French relating to Afro-tropical birds (i.e. south of the Sahara) including those which relate to the birds of south-west Arabia. Clearly this journal is going to contain much of general interest to those studying Arabian birds but will be especially relevant to birds occuring in the south western region. Annual subscriptions are £12.00 (US$25). Further information from (and subscription orders to) Mrs J. Oglethorpe, Tauraco Press, 27 Fieldside, Ely, Cambridgeshire, CB6 3AT, UK.

EXPEDITION NEWS: DJIBOUTI III

Djibouti is the tiny ex-French colony on the African side of Bab al Mandab, the narrow southern entrance to the Red Sea. Geoff and Hilary Welch have organised three expeditions in recent years to this little studied corner of Africa. Their last expedition, from 23 September to 11 November 1987, concentrated on the raptor passage across the southern Red Sea from Arabia into Africa.

There have been no previous studies in depth of this leg of the Eurasian-African migration although a considerable passage of large birds of prey across this narrow strait has long been suspected. Until the Welches' preliminary studies in 1985 there had been no confirmation that there was indeed a mass movement short sea crossing. The Welches had spectacular success on their most recent expedition, recording in all some 246,478 raptors of twenty six species coming out of Arabia. Their most impressive count was 76,586 Steppe Eagles *Aquila nipalensis* which, they say, is the highest recorded Middle East movement of this species at any one place. Considering that they had in addition 27,922 unidentified Aquila eagles and missed vital days observations, then probably some 100,000 Steppe Eagles enter northeast Africa at this point in Autumn. Other notable observations in their impressive list were 554 Egyptian Vultures but only 3 Griffon Vultures, 1,202 Short-toed Eagles and 1,123 Booted Eagles *Hieraaetus pennatus*. Arabian rarities passing in small numbers were 15 Honey Buzzards *Pernis apivorus* (the authors suspect that the main movement of this species was probably missed in early September), 7 Levant Sparrowhawk *Accipiter brevipes*, 31 Lesser-spotted Eagles *A.pomarina*, 20 Spotted Eagles *A.clanga* and 70 Imperial Eagles *A.heliaca*.

The Welches and their team did much good work locally for birds and ornithological public relations by helping with local conservation projects, including talks on wildlife to the local population at schools and colleges. They were also lucky enough to appear on the Djibouti television station. Surprisingly they made some good contacts with the local military authorities who, it seems, unlike many other parts of the Middle East, actually helped them with their studies. The Welches' work in Djibouti has done a lot to establish a local nature reserve and put the small country on the map as far as international migrants are concerned.

A preliminary report is available and a full report is being prepared for *Sandgrouse*. Details of the Djibouti expeditions so far, plus future plans for the area, can be obtained from Geoff and Hilary Welch at 21a East Delph, Whittlesea, Cambridgeshire, PE7 1RH, U.K.

CONSERVATION IN SAUDI ARABIA

The Arabian peninsula has witnessed the extinction or decimation of several species in the recent past. Hunting and habitat destruction on the one hand and increasing pressure on rangelands coupled with the fast pace of development on the other, have brought about this species loss and environmental degredation. A growing concern for wildlife heritage in Saudi Arabia has, however, precipitated efforts to reverse the trend and protect the life support systems and ecological processes. In less than three years the National Commission for Wildlife Conservation and Development, Riyadh (NCWCD) has gone a long way in building the basis for the conservation and sustainable use of natural resources of the Kingdom.

Striking biodiversity

Placed at the junction of the Oriental, Palearctic and Afrotropical realms, the Arabian Peninsula in general, and the Kingdom in particular, offers a considerable diversity of animal and plant life. Although the legendary Arabian Oryx and the majestic cheetah have gone the way of the Dodo the latest count of mammal species stands at 62. As for birds, 450 species have been recorded and the country is part of a major migratory route for species moving between the three adjacent biogeographical regions. The reptilian fauna comprises over 75 species, 5 of them endemic. The invertebrate group is also rich and varied expressing a high degree of endemism. For instance over 2,000 species of insects are recorded from the various aquatic and terrestrial habitats, as high as a quarter of them being endemic. A total of about 2,500 flowering plant species belonging to 130 families are distributed across the Kingdom, and of these 25 species are endemic.

Habitat Protection

A programme of the NCWCD is developing protected reserves in biologically important areas, following a holistic approach to the entire habitat. The concept of protected areas, however, is not new in Saudi Arabia. The country has a history of sustainable use of rangelands by designating them protected, either through law or convention. These traditional reserves, known as Hemas, were widespread until the recent past.

Through extensive reconnaissance surveys of the wildlands the NCWCD has identified the areas for protection and is currently embarked on a programme to establish and maintain protected areas, basing its criteria on the principles of the traditional Hema system, as well as the world conservation strategy. Incidentally, the principles of these two sources are greatly compatible. Six areas, about 50,000 square kilometers in extent and covering a variety of habitats and focal species, have already been declared protected and comprehensive habitat management plans are being pursued. Groundwork is progressing to bring seven other areas under protection.

The protected areas have already started yielding results. In Harrat al Harrah, in the north, the improvement in vegetation is glaringly obvious. Al Hawtah, a Nubian Ibex habitat south of Riyadh is also showing good signs of amelioration. In Farasan, a Red Sea archipelago and an important bird refuge, hunting and habitat destruction have been brought to a check. The birdlife of the Al Hair watercourse in the Riyadh environs - although not a statutory protected area - has been greatly enhanced, thanks to the attention and protection provided by the NCWCD in cooperation with the Riyadh principality.

Captive Breeding

Habitat protection measures alone are not sufficient to restore viable populations of the critically endangered species, and hence the need for captive breeding to augment the wild populations. Towards this end the Commission has set up two captive breeding and research centres. The National Wildlife Research Center (NWRC) at Taif, a major component institution of the NCWCD, focuses its captive breeding programmes on the Houbara and native ungulates. The Center has a good population of Houbara either caught as chicks from the wild or raised from eggs collected. These birds, now in their early period of sexual maturity are expected to breed successfully soon. The captivity behaviour and biology of the birds are intensively studied and efforts are underway to keep them under semi-captivity, simulating the natural environment. Concurrently, habitat based studies, employing satellite tracking methods, are also progressing. The captive propagation of the naturally extinct Arabian Oryx was initiated with animals obtained from the private collection of the late King Khalid and they are showing promising signs of breeding success. The once common Nubian Ibex is now reduced to a precarious number and confined to a few pockets. The NWRC captive breeding programme on the Ibex is expected to help the comeback of this species. The three species of endemic gazelles are also fast building up captive stocks, for eventual reintroduction.

The King Khalid Wildlife Research Center (KKWRC) at Thumamah near Riyadh was set up by transforming the late King's private wildlife farm. The Center conducts captive breeding programmes on the native species as well as maintaining several exotic

species. The Center holds a large captive collection of Sand Gazelle (Rheem), a species decimated in most of its former range.

On the move

Building the legal framework for the protection and rational use of the natural resources is yet another task the NCWCD is striving to achieve. Separate but complementary legislative measures are in the pipeline to acquire and develop nature reserves, checking hunting, and regulating the trade in wildlife species. The NCWCD has established strong working relations with the CITES and negotiations are underway for accession to the Convention.

The NCWCD's programme on environmental education has stimulated a new interest among the public in conservation. Apart from using the mass media, the NCWCD produces and widely circulates various kinds of environmental education resource materials on different themes. The intensive media coverage of the Arab Environment Day, observed on October 14 was an indication of the growing public interest in conservation.

Some of the research and survey projects other than the ones mentioned above include extensive studies on the mangrove habitats on the Red Sea coast; a long term research project on the nearly extinct Arabian Bustard; sponsoring the *Atlas of the Breeding Birds of Arabia* (ABBA) and *Phoenix*, and so on. The NCWCD has also taken up the sponsorship of the *Fauna of Saudi Arabia* series. Ground has been broken to build a national natural history museum in Riyadh. And for meeting the manpower needs, a new cadre of Saudi biologists is being trained in the various projects of the NCWCD.

As everywhere else in the world, nature conservation in Saudi Arabia is facing heavy odds. Nonetheless, the momentum gathered by the NCWCD in the last two years, under the direction of HRH Prince Saud Al-Faisal, the Managing Director, and the enthusiasm of Prof.Dr.Abdulaziz H.Abuzinada, the Secretary General, is a certain indication that nature is at last going to get a chance in this historic land.

Faizi S.Hameed

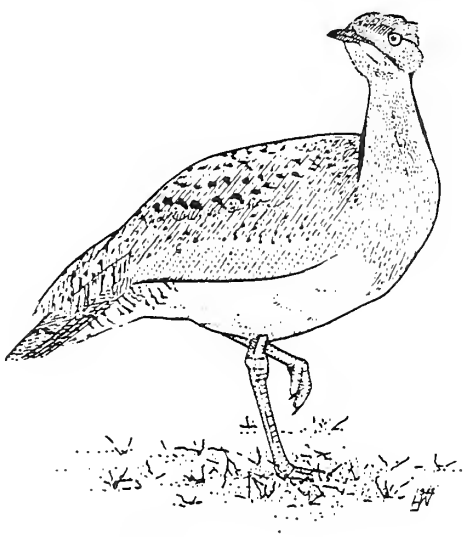

Fig 9 Over-grazing by domestic stock deprives Houbara of food and cover for nesting. See article on former breeding distribution.

KUWAIT AVIFAUNAL SURVEY

In March 1985 I was fortunate enough to obtain the generous financial support of Kuwait's Environment Council (EPC) to conduct a country-wide avifaunal survey of the Kuwait mainland. Initially, the proposal was to carry this out for one year as a pilot study to a long term project. However, the Council enthusiastically and generously encouraged its continuing for a second year.

The survey had several aims, the principal one being to establish a clear picture of which species occur in Kuwait and whether breeding takes place here. Rapid industrialisation and urbanisation have produced, and are producing, dramatic changes in the country and these are certain to affect the occurrence and status of avian species. Inevitably, some environmental changes will be detrimental to the avifauna but others, such as the government-backed afforestation programme and support for increased horticultural activities, will be highly beneficial. The EPC is a government agency and is directed by Amiri decree to take action to protect flora and fauna that may be endangered. Thus, in order to function effectively, the Council recognised the need to conduct extensive, appropriate surveys.

The project was originally planned to start in January 1985 in order to coincide with the launch of the ABBA venture, but for unavoidable reasons it was delayed until April. It was my intention to have at least one observer in the field full-time for three months throughout each spring period. In the event, the survey encompassed the late spring of 1985, the whole of that of 1986 and most of that of 1987. The work of the full-time observer was supplemented by three additional observers at weekends. Throughout the remainder of the year, field work was conducted at weekends only and regular visits were made to the same selected sites in alternate weeks.

The half-degree grid of the ABBA scheme is too large for systematic recording in Kuwait, so a compatible grid based on units of 10′ x 10′ was adopted, which gave a survey unit of approximately 16 x 18 km. The mainland of Kuwait occupies 50% or more of the area of each of 63 squares and except for two in the north-west, all were covered in the survey. In all squares we recorded every bird seen, with identification to species and sex where possible. In the second year of the survey a trapping programme was pursued in order to resolve some difficulties with identification of certain *Sylviidae*. Breeding activity was noted and coded in accordance with the classification used by ABBA. Quantitative data were collected by means of driven or walked measured transects, depending on the area and its habitats.

The survey recorded a total of 251 species between April 1985 and April 1987, 221 of which were noted in the first year. Of these, only 14 species were confirmed breeders. Five species were new to the Kuwait list and the breeding of Red-vented Bulbul was confirmed for the first time. An interesting finding was that 24 vagrant species were recorded, in some cases in both years of the survey. This raises the old question; to what extent is status a matter of observer cover?

The Final Report is currently under consideration by the Research Committee of the EPC and I anticipate that it will agree that a full account of the results should be published before the end of this year. I hope that the report will be available for general distribution then.

Prof.C.W.T.Pilcher

+ +

DATA PASSED ON

Due to the necessarily extended period over which information for the Atlas is being collected it is important that the data bank be available for use by all who need it. Information, including draft maps and other breeding data, on individual species, groups of species or the birds in finite areas can be provided on request and indeed enquiries are welcomed. Enquiries have so far come from ABBA contributors wanting historical records to "write up" the birds of their local area; researchers from around the world, but especially Africa or Asia, working on groups of species occurring also in Arabia and those interested in general aspects of Middle East ornithology. Information passed on in the twelve months since the issue of *Phoenix* 4 has gone to *Birds of the Western Palearctic* final update for Vol.6, 16 draft maps Fan-tailed Warbler to Great

Grey Shrike and update for Vol.7, 13 species Magpie to House Bunting; Dr M.Delibes (Spain), Lammergeier; M.D.Gallagher (Oman), Spotted Thicknee and Stone Curlew; D.Le Mesurier (KSA), Bonelli's Eagle; C.Richardson (Dubai), breeding species in UAE and comments on draft breeding maps prepared for book on UAE birds; Dr C.Ryall (Kenya), Indian House Crow; P.Symens (KSA), Lappet-faced Vulture, Sooty Falcon, Tufted Guineafowl and Houbara; Dr P Vine (Ireland) lists of breeding birds for Qatar and Kuwait. In addition individual items of information have been provided to a large number of correspondents.

Information that can be supplied at present is limited only by the manual record system in operation. Once the information bank is automated a much more comprehensive information service will be available. Contributors provide records to the project on the understanding that their records may be passed on to anyone who has a legitimate use for them. However, the facility does exist for contributors to place an embargo on individual records, e.g. if they wish to protect a rare breeding species or where they intend to publish their own information exclusively.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

Second Mediterranean Seabird Symposium - Majorca, Spain, March 1989

The Mediterranean Marine Bird Association (MEDMARAVIS) is to hold its second symposium at Parma di Milorca on 21-26 March 1989. The symposium will concentrate on the status and conservation of seabirds, ecogeography and an action plan for the protection of Mediterranean seabird species. Four different sessions are planned:-

- -status and distribution of breeding populations
- -post-nuptial distribution
- -recent ecological research
- -habitat conservation and Mediterranean action plan

Other activities include two boat excursions, poster sessions, specialist workshops and audio-visual presentations. For futher information please contact MEDMARAVIS, 20 rue St.Martin, 75004 Paris, France.

ICBP Conference and Symposium: Adana, Turkey, May 1989

The XVIIth ICBP European Continental Section Conference will take place at Adana on the southern Mediterranean coast of Turkey, 15-20 May 1989. Provisional topics for discussion include migration bottlenecks, Slender-billed Curlew *Numenius tenuirostris* and important bird areas. Two days are set aside as a symposium on important bird areas in Turkey and palearctic migrants in Africa. There is also a one day excursion, although it is not known which of the many good bird sites locally will be visited. Details are available from the ICBP Secretariat, 32 Cambridge Road, Girton, Cambridge, CB3 0PJ, U.K.

Ornithological Society of the Middle East AGM

The 1989 Annual Meeting of OSME will take place on 15 July 1989 in the Lecture Theatre of the British Museum (Natural History), South Kensington in London. If previous AGM's are anything to go by, members and guests will have a very full and interesting afternoon of talks, films and discussion. Details from the OSME Secretary, c/o The Lodge, Sandy, Bedfordshire, SG19 2DL, U.K.

SOCIETY NEWS

This item aims to keep readers up to date with the activities and publications of those societies, organisations and groups who are concerned with the birds and natural history of Arabia.

Ornithological Society of Egypt

Anyone thinking of birding in Egypt should contact Mindy Rosenzweig who is working for ICBP in Cairo and attached to the Egyptian Wildlife Service. She says that the next issue of *Courser*, the OSE journal, is in a late stage of production. Write to her:- ICBP Coordinator, c/o Egyptian Wildlife Service, Giza Zoo, Cairo, Egypt.

Sinai Newsletter

The *Sinai Newsletter* has, until now, been a rather narrow publication specifically interested in conservation in the biblical 'Holy Land'. It has recently widened its area of interest to include the whole of the Middle East area. The most recent issue (vol.6, no.1, June 1988) has notes and articles on Egypt, Israel, Lebanon, UAE, Syria and Djibouti, as well as on subjects as diverse as nature reserves, CITES, trade in animal products, conservation education, reviews and raptor migration. The newsletter is published by the Holy Land Conservation Fund, Editor: Bertel Bruun, 969 Park Avenue, New York, NY 10028, U.S.A. Ask for a sample copy.

Emirates Natural History Group (Abu Dhabi)

The Group is now under the patronage of UAE University Chancellor Sheikh Nahyan bin Mubarak al Nahyan, and has been allocated permanent rooms in the old fort (Qasr al Hisn) in Abu Dhabi, home of the country's Centre for Documentation and Research. A small natural history museum is being established. The new (and hopefully permanent) address is: ENHG(AD), P.O.Box 2380, Abu Dhabi, U.A.E.

Nature and Ornithological Society of Yemen

This group which extends its interests over the PDRY and YAR seems to have had problems in holding together recently. It is still alive but does not seem to be kicking very hard. NOSY can be contacted by writing to Mrs Margaret Higgins, c/o British Veterinary Project, F.C.O. (Sana'a, Y.A.R.), 14 King Charles Street, London SW1A 2AH.

ANNOUNCEMENTS & REQUESTS FOR INFORMATION

Breeding birds in the U.A.E.

Work is currently underway on the preparation of a birdwatching guide for the U.A.E. It will concentrate on the status and distribution of all species recorded there, and will include breeding maps of all nesting species. If anyone has any breeding information which has not been submitted to the ABBA coordinator, particularly of common species in more remote areas, no matter how old, it will be very gratefully received. Information should be sent to Colin Richardson, P.O.Box 2825, Dubai, United Arab Emirates.

Carbon-dating of Ostrich eggshell fragments from Arabia

A project is proceeding to establish the age of the numerous Ostrich eggshell fragments which have been found in the Arabian Peninsula. A paper on the subject is planned. The authors wish to receive Ostrich eggshell fragments for carbon-dating, or information concerning the whereabouts of such samples in private collections, etc. The ideal weight of samples should be in the order of 10 g or more but smaller samples would also be acceptable. Readers with Ostrich eggshell fragments from Arabia, or information about where such samples are held, should contact the senior author, Professor William Buttiker, Lanzenberg 21, 4465 Magden, Switzerland.

Insects of Eastern Arabia

Enclosed with this issue is a brochure advertising this new book, see review above. Those who are unable to find a copy locally can order one direct from the publishers, Macmillan Publishers, Houndmills, Basingstoke, RG21 2XS, U.K.

For Sale

A few copies of a report prepared on an ornithological survey of the Asir National Park, Saudi Arabia (76 pages), summary reports on 6 ABBA surveys and some other items are available from the Co-ordinator. See slip enclosed with this newsletter.

RECORDS WANTED

Readers who have records of Arabian birds, however old, and whether published or not, and who have not yet received the "Instructions to Contributors" and a set of report forms, are urged to make contact with the co-ordinator. Old records are especially valuable in assessing population changes and range expansions and contractions. Although the project concerns resident and breeding species, it is not only proved breeding information that is sought; presence, possible and probable breeding information is just as valuable. Information on exotics and escaped species, ringed birds and habitats is also needed.

CONTRIBUTIONS TO *PHOENIX*

Short articles relevant to the aims of the ABBA project are welcomed, especially notes on the avifauna of specific areas or studies concerning particular species. Consideration should be given to offerring more lengthy papers to the journals or newsletter of local or regional natural history groups and societies. Scientific papers on the ornithology of Arabia and elsewhere in the Middle East may be offerred to *Sandgrouse* the journal of the Ornithological Society of the Middle East, c/o The Lodge, Sandy, Bedfordshire, SG19 2DL, England. Notices, requests for information and advertisements of reports etc. are inserted in *Phoenix* free of charge. All submissions should be typed, double spaced, with wide margins.

HOW TO OBTAIN *PHOENIX*

The *Phoenix* is issued free to all current contributors to the ABBA project and is sent to benefactors and recent correspondents. A bundle of every issue is also passed to each society or group active in Arabia. It is available on subscription for a single payment of £15 ($30) for the next five issues, i.e. numbers 6 to 10. Subscribers receive a reminder when their next subscription is due. *Phoenix* nos 1-4 are available at £2 each. Those leaving Arabia might be interested in placing a subscription order as the price represents a small sum for all the news of Arabian birds for five years. Any profit on sales and subscription orders goes towards ABBA administrative costs.

DONATIONS, SPONSORSHIP & FINANCE

Atlasers, correspondents and supporters have continued to be extremely generous and the ongoing costs of the project have again be largely met by donations from individuals and societies totalling £750 in the last 12 months. This help is very gratefully acknowledged. Total project costs since the issue of *Phoenix* 4 (including *Phoenix* 4 but not No.5) have totalled £1130. Major costs have been postage and telephone £350, typing and other services £360 and printing of *Phoenix* 4, £215.

Much gratitude is extended to the National Commission for Wildlife Conservation & Development, Riyadh, for meeting a proportion of the administrative expenses of the project by financial sponsorship totalling £300. Also many thanks are due to the Ornithological Society of the Middle East for their generous donation of £200 towards project costs. Individual donations have been received from the following during the last 12 months: Anonymous (5) £91; J.S.Ajarem (KSA) £3; G.Bates (KSA) £9; L.Boxberger (YAR) £10; I.J.A.Brown (Oman) £8; J.Eriksen (Oman) £5; P.Goriup (UK) 40 SR; T.M.Gullick (Spain) £10; P.Holt (Switz) £10; A.D.Inglis (UK) £10; D.R.James (KSA) £15; D.Le Mesurier (KSA) £10; V.Mellish (KSA) £15; E.Möller (W.Germany) £15; R.Nation (Qatar) £8; M.Shihab (Kuwait) £8; S.Smith (Hong Kong) £3; A.J.Stagg (KSA) £25 and J.H.Thompson (UK) £15. Sincere thanks to all these people.

Gifts in kind are also acknowledged with much gratitude. Many people provided assistance in diverse ways with two atlasing surveys by the Co-ordinator to Saudi Arabia in 1988 and this is much appreciated. The help of Dr.Abdulaziz Abuzinada, the Secretary General of NCWCD Riyadh, who provided official sponsorship for the visits, made all logistical arrangements and met travel costs to and within Saudi Arabia was invaluable. Once again many thanks to Mrs Effie Warr for much help in the preparation of *Phoenix* 5 and with the project throughout the year.

PHOTOS NEEDED FOR *PHOENIX*

Photos of habitats, Arabian breeding birds, nests and eggs etc. are welcomed and requested for inclusion in future issues of *Phoenix*. Photos may be printed with just a caption, for their aesthetic value, or can be submitted to illustrate notes and papers. Photos should be black and white (glossy or matt) with good contrast and a width of at least 12 cm.

CREDITS

Logo, Keith Brockie; Indian House Crow, Franklin Coombs; Olive Pigeon, Ian Willis; Thick-billed Lark, Houbara, Steppe Eagles, map base & *Phoenix* 5 title-page layout, Hilary Welch; Fig 3, Colin Richardson; other maps M.C.J.

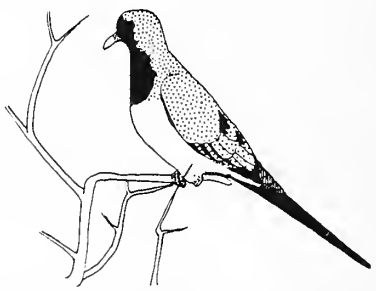

Fig 10 Namaqua Dove found for the first time in northern Oman in 1987.

ADDRESS

All correspondence for the *Atlas of the Breeding Birds of Arabia* and *Phoenix* should be sent to Michael C.Jennings, Co-ordinator ABBA, Moonraker Cottage, 1 Eastcourt, Burbage, Wiltshire, SN8 3AG, England.